

THE BOYS ^{AND} GIRLS
OF MARBLE DALE



BY
MARY D. BRINE



McLOUGHLIN BROS

*Historical
Children's Books*

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Merry Xmas (1907)
to
Beulah.

From Myrtle.



RHODA TAKES A WALK.

THE BOYS AND GIRLS OF MARBLE DALE

BY
MARY D. BRINE

AUTHOR OF "DOZEN AND ONE," "FROM GOLD TO GRAY," "A MOTHER'S SONG," "ECHOES FROM
STORY LAND," "STORIES GRANDMA TOLD," "THE MERRY GO ROUND," "JINGLES AND JOYS,"
"PAPA'S LITTLE DAUGHTER," "FOUR FRIENDS," "HITHER AND THITHER," ETC., ETC.



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Dear young friends,
 Again to you
 I send an offering
 Fresh and new.
 A book for girls,
 A book for boys,
 A book wherein
 Your woes and joys



Will all be mirrored faith-
 fully
 (For like real life this
 book should be).

In summer, or
 In winter time



I trust this little book
 will chime
 With all your moods,
 and gladden you,

And so fulfil a mission true. M. D. B.

THE BOYS AND GIRLS OF MARBLE DALE.

CHAPTER I.

THE WAKELY HOME.



PRETTY little farmhouse set back beyond an avenue of trees—grand old trees, through which the June sunshine is flickering and dancing, and falling upon the turfy path beneath the interlacing boughs, playing at hide and seek with the fantastic shadows, until at last it plunges merrily into a beautiful lake which terminates the pathway almost abruptly.

There the frolicsome ripples catch the golden shower, and transform it into myriads of flashing diamonds, sparkling upon the broad bosom of the lake, and spreading themselves far and near.

From an upper window of the farmhouse a child's brown eyes are watching the lovely landscape, and a child's young ears are drinking in the sweet melody which is poured from the throats of a countless number of songsters which invade the tree-tops, and build their nests without fear of snare or gun while so near the shelter of the pretty Wakely home.

It is a merry day, and all nature seems full of happiness. What disturbing element, then, has crossed little Rhoda Wakely's path on this bright morning, that the brown eyes are sober in expression, and the pretty young face wearing a puzzled frown in spite of the sunbeams and bird-music she loves so well?

Rhoda is seeing something beside all the beauty before her, and hearing something which is like a minor strain in the harmony of sweet sounds. You could not guess, though you tried all day, what is troubling her, so I will tell you that it is the sight of a troubled face, and the sound of a tired sigh which lie between the little girl's thoughts and the beautiful scene outside her window. Two rather trifling things, perhaps you think, but they are mother's troubles, and the childish heart feels their weight accordingly.

"Something has troubled mamma and papa for a long time," Rhoda is thinking, as she watches the sparkling lake, and follows its mimic waves as they roll in and out beneath the stone terrace with which the pathway from the house terminates. "Something is going crooked with 'em, I know well enough, 'cause I never saw mamma look so kind of tired and sorry before, and I am sure there were lots of tears in that sigh of hers this morning. Oh dear!"

A boy's whistle comes merrily up from below. Rhoda leans from her window and looks down upon a boy who is hurrying towards the lake. It is her brother Jack, of whom she is especially

fond for the reason that they are twin brother and sister, hand and hand in every sport, and doubling the joy of their birthdays by celebrating them together.

Their last birthday made them twelve years old, and by this



this time they are well on towards those wonderful "teens" which add so greatly to childhood's importance, you know.

"Jack, Ja-ack!" calls Rhoda.

He looks up, and responds with "Hello, Rhode! come along down an' have a row. It's a boss day!"

Rhoda looks dubious. She dearly loves a row on the lake, and is as "good a fellow" as Jack himself at handling the oars. But somehow her spirits are at low ebb this morning, and she is not sure whether it will be right and proper for Jack and herself to go out on the lake and have a merry time while poor mamma is so mysteriously sad and troubled.

"Coming, Rhode?" asks Jack, after waiting a second for his sister's answer.

"Come up here, Jack dear. I want to speak privately to you. Come up."

"All right, sis," is the ready answer; "if you've got a secret, I'm the feller to listen, you know."

And disappearing from the lawn he is presently in Rhoda's room, bringing with him a goodly portion of the sunshine from without on his round, freckled face, and an expectant look in his blue eyes.

"Go ahead, sis, let her out," he says, coming over to his sister and seating himself on the low window-sill. Rhoda looks up reprovingly.

"Oh, Jack, what a way to talk! Boys are so awfully slangy. Well, I wanted to ask you, did you hear mamma give that big sigh this morning as she came out of the sitting-room with papa?"



THE WAKELY HOMESTEAD.

Such a long, tired kind of a sigh? Did you hear it, Jack dear?"

Jack looks puzzled. "No, I didn't. What was she doing it for, anyway, sis?"

"That's just what I want to know myself," replies Rhoda, a troubled frown on her brow. "Something's been going wrong with papa, too, lately, 'cause I've seen him look so awfully sober sometimes, and this morning he and mamma were a perfect age talking and talking in the sitting-room, and then she came out looking so timid and kind of worried, and then she sighed in the awfulest way, Jack! I don't see why you didn't hear her."

Jack shifts his position, and throws one leg out of the window, casting longing eyes meanwhile at the sparkling lake, and giving a secret thought to the little boat which is moored beneath the steps, and is at this minute bobbing about on the mimic waves.

"Well, I didn't hear her, anyhow," he replies, "and I don't see why you should fret so over a sigh! Likely as not mamma was tired 'bout something, and I don't see what papa's got to worry over when the crops are growing, 'n' everything seems to be flourishing; 'sides, if mamma sighed and didn't tell us why, it's a sure sign that it ain't any of our business, anyway, and I don't think we've got any right to be prying into it, and now that's all I know what to say 'bout it. You better come along and have a row, Rhoda; it's too boss a day to be staying in this room for nothing."

Rhoda looks up with flashing eyes.

"I guess a big sigh right straight out of my mother's dear heart isn't just 'nothing,' Jack Wakely. I don't b'lieve you love mamma much! I'm 'stonished at you!"

"All right, sis, maybe I don't, but"—with a comical wink of his right eye—"I rather guess I do, and I'm so glad I've got her that I can't be fretting and moping in the house. I think it's more feeling to go out in the light sunshine and—and be thankful. Come along, won't you, Rhode? Say, I shouldn't wonder if we could do some fishing, too, and s'prise mamma with some pickerel; hey, sis?"

But Rhoda hesitates. "Won't it look kind of heartless, Jack? Seems as if we ought to stay home and help mamma be sorry."

"Fiddle de dee, what geese we'd be, to stay and add to the miser—ee," sings Jack, who prides himself upon being a "born poet." "I tell you, Rhode, you only add to mamma's worry by noticing it, and besides, you're being meddlesome too, don't you see? I'm going, anyway, to have some fun; you can stay here and mope—good-by."

He swings his other leg out of the window, catches hold of the vine which sturdily clammers towards the roof the house, and lets himself down with the agility of a monkey, while Rhoda, unable to bear the idea that her twin brother is having a good time with-

out her, darts through her doorway, and runs down the staircase, meeting Jack beneath the window of her room.

"I'll go with you," she says, "but I think we ought to tell mamma first, 'cause you see, Jack, she might want us."

"All right, sis, go ahead an' tell her; I'll be getting the 'Lily Pad' ready."

So Rhoda speeds away to the rear of the house, certain of finding her mother in the kitchen busy with her duties there, for Chloe, the fat black "help," can not do everything necessary to be done about the Wakely home, and there is only one servant employed for housework.

Rhoda remembers when there were two women, besides the men who helped her father about the farm. But lately—that means within a couple of years—things have changed, and Chloe, the woman, and Jem, the man, besides Bill, the "chore boy," are the only "help" (as they call themselves) upon the place now.

Mamma is baking gingerbread, and as Rhoda's face appears at the kitchen door, she holds up a nice hot piece and beckons with a smile.

Chloe chuckles, as Rhoda runs eagerly forward.

"Dar now, I knowed dat gal 'ud be smellin 'dat 'ere gingerbread 'way outen doors. Never see her beat fer dat article ob food, I tell you!"

Rhoda laughs. "That's 'cause I know a good thing, Chloe," she replies; then, "Mamma dear, if you don't want Jack an' me, we're going on the lake a little bit."

Mamma nods, which means "all right, go on," and the little girl impulsively throws her arms about her mother's neck.

"Dear sweet mamma," she whispers, "I heard you sigh this morning; did you know it? And oh, I am so worried about you. Won't you just whisper and tell me what it was for?"

Mamma smiles, and whispers in return.

"It was all about a trifling matter, when I come to think it over, but you and Jack shall hear about it very soon, dearie."

"H'm! whar dar's whisperin', dar's allus somefin said, I heard my ole mammy say once," says Chloe, shrugging her shoulders, and casting a side glance at the mother and daughter.

But Chloe is a privileged character, and means no disrespect, and all she gets for her speech is a sly pinch of her fat arm as Rhoda runs out into the sunshine again, eating her gingerbread, and carrying a piece for Jack also.

Jack is standing on the little stone pier waiting rather impatiently for his sister.

"I say, Rhode, you've"—he begins as she joins him at last, but the gingerbread produces a change of feeling, and the scowl and impatient speech die at once out of existence.

"Jolly, this is good!" he exclaims between big mouthfuls, as

he and Rhoda seat themselves in the pretty little boat, and drift from shore.

"Yes, mamma was just making it," answers Rhoda, "and oh! Jack! mamma says she will tell us pretty soon what made her sigh. She says it was only a trifle anyhow, and—and I feel as if a stone had rolled right off of my heart, truly I do."

Jack looks triumphant.

"Well, I told you there wasn't any use to be sitting and moping upstairs over just a sigh. Why, I can sigh too; listen!" and the boy puts on a doleful face and draws a long, sobbing breath. "Why don't you look worried, sis? Didn't you hear me?"

Rhoda laughs. "'Cause your sigh and your eyes don't agree together," she replies, "but mamma's did. Look, Jack, there's Jem watering the horses."

Jack who is rowing, lets his oars rest, and turns to look behind him.

Sure enough, at the further side of the lake, where the soft, green meadow slopes to the water's edge, Jem has led the horses under the shade of the trees for a drink of the clear water.

The animals are harnessed, and are evidently ready for being put before the wagon.

"Going anywhere, Jem?" calls Jack, beginning to row towards the man.

Jem looks up with a grin.

"Reckon I be! Mr. Wakely he wants ter send a message to the York paper, I b'live. Goin' ter ketch fish, Jack?"

But Jack doesn't heed the question, while his thoughts are intent upon the answer Jem had given him first. "'Going to send a message to the New York paper,'" he repeats, looking at Rhoda, whose eyes are opened wide with astonishment. "What on earth does Jem mean, sis?"

"An' what does papa want to



WATERING THE HORSES.

send a message about, Jack?" queries the little girl, screwing

up her forehead, and thinking again of mamma's sigh that morning.

Oh, Jack, I'm sure it's got something to do with mamma's awful sigh, and maybe it's something about a doctor. Oh dear! Oh dear! I'm so 'fraid poor mamma is sick and—and we don't know it."

"Would being sick be a trifling thing?" replies Jack crossly; "an' didn't mamma tell you it was only a trifling thing made her sigh? Do have some sense, Rhode, and—and don't be scaring a feller."

He does indeed feel "scared" at the sudden suggestion of his mother's possible sickness, for Jack is a loyal little son, and by no means as "heartless" as Rhoda has considered him with his careless speech and air. "I don't feel like fishing—do you?" he asks presently, after Jem has gone with his horses back to the barn, and not all the guessing in the world brings the two children any nearer the solution of the man's errand to the post-office.

"No, I don't," is Rhoda's reply, and the dainty fishing-tackle is pushed more securely under the seat.

"Say, Rhode, let's go back. I don't feel like a row after all—do you?"

"No, I don't. I feel the stone in my heart again, Jack, and—let's go home."

"If there's anything I hate and just despise," said Jack, with a

snappish pull on his oars, and a snappish tone in his voice, "it's mysteries and things; they do make a feller feel so—so uncomfortable."

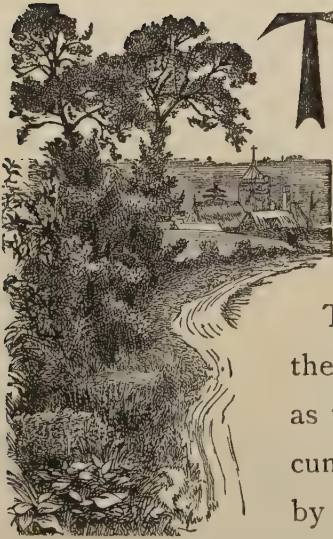
"So do I hate 'em, too," assents Rhoda, letting her hand dabble in the ripples at the "Lily Pad's" side, and watching the sunshine sparkle everywhere about her, without appreciating its beauty, for again the sight of mamma's troubled face and the sound of mamma's troubled sigh comes between her and the loveliness of the scene before her brown eyes.

So they row quietly back to the landing—the little son and daughter—each worried over the wonderful mystery which seems somehow to have had its birth with mamma's sigh.



CHAPTER II.

THE SECRET COMES OUT—AT LAST.



THREE or four days are passed. Rhoda and Jack are by this time quite convinced that sickness on the part of neither father nor mother had caused the sending of that message to a New York paper.

That has comforted them considerably, and they have been waiting with as much patience as they could command under the trying circumstances, for the enlightenment promised by their mother.

It is another lovely day, and the twins are enjoying the seclusion of their favorite nook in the barn, where they have held, and will continue to hold, many a secret confab, and plot many a delightful plan.

Rhoda, who looks forward with much regret to that coming age when dolls must be laid aside, and the dignity of the "teens"

acquired, is now at any rate enjoying the society of her fondly-loved and rather ancient doll, which the mischief-loving Jack has caused, during several sportive occasions, to lose what little beauty it formerly could boast of. With her doll in her lap Rhoda is busy over the pages of a fairy-book, and Jack, lying at full length on the hay at her feet, is deep in the account of a "no end jolly ghost story." "There are real lovely mysteries in my book, Jack," says Rhoda presently. "Queer things that the giants are doing, and the fairies punish 'em for, in ways the giants don't expect will happen at all. You ought to read it."

"Well, you ought to read mine, too. There's a lot of ghosts in it, and they scare a feller who is going through the woods at night. I tell you, it's—hello! didn't some one call me then?"

He drags himself along on his stomach, and peers over the edge of the loft, down the ladder-way, and listens attentively, motioning Rhoda to keep quiet.

Yes, some one is calling: "Jack! Jack!"

It is papa's voice, and Jack scrambles down the ladder immediately, calling in reply:

"Yes, papa, all right! here I am!" while Rhoda, not wishing to enjoy her cosy nook alone, follows after her brother as fast as her skirts, her book, and her doll will permit.

She finds Jack at her father's side, and hears him receive instruction to go to the village and tell the carpenter to come out

to the Wakely House on the following day, and bring his tools with him.

Jack looks curious, but cannot delay to ask questions, as his father bids him go at once.

"I'll ride 'Blacktail,' papa," he says. "That pony is just spoiling for a canter."

"As you like, my son," is the reply, "and tell Miggs to be sure and come early, for there is considerable to be done about the house."

"More mystery, Rhoda," says Jack, as she stands beside him, while he saddles "Blacktail,"—the fat pony with a jet-black tail to set off his light-gray body.

"Well," replies Rhoda, "I tell you, Jack, it's all just as though we were living in fairyland, and—and we don't know the minute a queer thing 'll happen. Oh, I do wish mamma would hurry and tell us."

Jack is soon mounted, and as he rides out into the broad roadway, Rhoda goes up to her own room to finish her book.

But the word "mystery" is written in letters visible only to her mind's eye on the pages before her, and the little girl's thoughts are divided between her father and her brother Jack.

"Oh, bother!" she exclaims at last. "I'm tired of wondering! I'm tired of thinking! I'm just worn out with waiting to find out what everything means! I'm—hello! there's Bobby Bunting!"



THE FAVORITE NOOK IN THE BARN.

The soft trilling of a bird is heard close at the window, and as Rhoda gives a low, clear whistle, the trill gives place to the whirr of wings, and presently a pretty robin is perched upon the

table beside her.

“Ho, Robin! sweet little Robin!” cries Rhoda, as the bird she and Jack have tamed from a wee nestling flutters its wings and sways its pretty head from side to side before her. “You’re a mystery too. How can you fly so safely? how can you sing so sweetly? how came you with your

beautiful red breast, and what do you do all day? Who do you tell bird-secrets to? and where are you going from here? Oh, dear! I wish Jack would hurry home and bring me some good news!”

So talking to the robin, and thinking of Jack, the book lies





ROBIN AND RHODA.

unheeded at her side until a sudden call in her mother's voice startles the little girl from her occupation of feeding her pet with the sweets he likes so well, and causes her to jump from her chair quickly, while the bird flies back to the safe shelter of the tree-top.

"Coming, mamma! coming! coming!" replies Rhoda, as she skips from the room and hurries down-stairs.

"Come in here, dear," says mamma, standing in the doorway of the room below. "I have something to talk with you about, and I shall expect you to be very helpful to me in the carrying out of some plans papa and I have arranged."

Rhoda's heart gives a quick throb.

"She is going to tell the secret now, I am sure," she thinks, as she follows mamma into the room, and closes the door.

Meanwhile Jack and "Blacktail" have made short work of the distance between the farm and the village, and Miggs has promised to be on hand the following morning.

Jack is about to start for home, when the old postmaster puts his head from a side window and calls,

"Hi! youngster! wait a bit. Seein' as it's you, an' you're down this way, here's a postal for your pa, an' you might as well take it along, 'stead of waitin' till he comes down after the night mail. This 'ere come by way of Waramaug station, an' I dunno but what your pa'll be lookin' for it."

Jack halts before the post-office door, and the card is brought out to him.

"No harm to read a postal," he thinks, riding slowly homeward. "Postals are meant for nothing but a message, and I guess if the folks along the line have had a peep, I can, 'cause I'm my father's son, and the second man in the fam'ly. Anyway, I'm going to."

He suits the action to the word, and in another moment the postal card is directly under the curious scrutiny of his blue eyes, and all they see are these lines :

"N. Y.—1888. Dear sir: Have renewed ad. as per your request, &c., &c. ———."

"What's an 'ad.' anyway?" says Jack, addressing apparently his pony's ear. "What's the thing mean, anyhow, I'd like to know?" stuffing the card in his pocket, and puckering his brows.

"It's just another bothering mystery, that's what it is; and I think pretty soon I'll be a mystery my own self. G'long, Blacktail! what's the use of crawling over the road! Don't you 'spose a feller's in a hurry to get home and find out what an 'ad.' means? G'long, I say!"

Blacktail slowly switches his beautiful tail, and draws his feet together a little more speedily, and over the road again they go, until at last Jack dismounts, and, turning his pony loose from saddle and bridle, is soon in search of his father, to whom he

hands the postal card, and stands expectantly by to watch the result.

Papa reads the lines, puts the card into his pocket, and proceeds to give Jem (with whom he was talking when Jack found him) further instructions concerning the garden.

"I say, papa!" cries Jack, slipping a word in edgewise, "what's a—a—an 'ad.' mean?"

Papa seems not to hear, but continues to discuss beans and pease with Jem.

"Papa, I say, papa, what's an 'ad.'?" persists Jack.

Papa turns around.

"An 'ad,' Jack; why, what do you mean, my boy?"

"Why, it says 'ad.' on your card there, you know."

"Oh, that? Well, an 'ad.' means — what's that, Jem? Plant the beans there, you see, over by the corner fence, and—"

"Papa, won't you please tell me what—"

"My son," says papa, "do not interrupt me so. I am busy, don't you see I am?"

Jack shrugs his shoulders, and tosses up his chin.

"H'm! got to be put off for old beans, when I don't know beans about that word 'ad.'"

So he goes into the house in search of mamma, from whom he hopes to gain the desired information. On the staircase he meets his sister. Her face wears a look of content which he has

not seen there for some days. In fact it is an expression of triumph, as though some long desired object had ended in a glorious victory. Jack takes all this in at a glance, and pauses midway on the stairs.

"You've been and found out the mystery, Rhode Wakely, you know you have! Ain't you mean to do it when I wasn't here!"

Rhoda puts on a superior air. She is in a teasing mood perhaps, or maybe she feels an honest indignation at being accused of meanness. At any rate there is a look of elation in her eyes and about her mouth, which Jack translates thus:

"I am a girl, you are only a boy. I am my mother's confidante; your time has not yet come."

So he braces his sturdy figure upon the step before Rhoda, and with one hand on the wall, the other on the baluster, he prevents his sister from descending.

"Rhoda, you're real mean, and that's no joke. You do know something 'bout that secret, and you're going to keep it from me."

"Very well, if you call your own sister names, it's enough to make her keep secrets from you," says Rhoda loftily, trying to lift his brown hand from the baluster.

"You might remember that you're a twin, anyhow?" retorts Jack, with the air of one who has played his last chance, and if it should fail has nothing left to build his hopes upon.

But it proves a successful venture, for Rhoda grows grave

on the instant. Sure enough, she is a twin. Jack is her own twin brother, from whom she has never kept secrets. The idea of her knowing a single thing which he does not know also! Why, it is dreadful to think of! How cruel she has been, to be sure! Poor Jack! She is quite ashamed of herself for her little moment of triumph, and feeling of superiority.

"Come along, dear old Jackabus," she says, turning a pair of repentant brown eyes to meet his reproachful blue orbs, "come along to the orchard and I'll tell you all about it. Mamma has told me, and though I'm glad to know the secret at last, yet somehow, somehow—I ain't quite sure whether it is so nice, after all."

Jack swings his figure upon the balusters and slides down, boy-fashion, to the end of the staircase, landing upon his feet with a whoop.

"Anyhow, I know something you don't know!" he says, as they hurry along to the orchard, where the trees are growing day by day more full of their own luxuriant beauty and blossoming sweetness. "I know something that happened while I was doing papa's errand."

Rhoda is breathless with expectation, and also a little fear lest he should retaliate, and punish her for her unkind treatment of him.

She will use the same charm upon him which had worked so speedily with her.



RHODA AND JACK HAVE A CONFAB.

"Jack Wakely, remember that we are twins," she says solemnly.

"Ho! think I forget that?" asks the boy scornfully. "I ain't so mean as a girl can—sometimes be," with a furtive glance from under his lashes in Rhoda's direction. "See here, Rhode, here's a good place; let's talk here."

"All right." So they fling themselves down under the shade of one of the large trees, and Rhoda throws her hat upon the grass beside her.

She looks at her brother. Jack looks at her.

"Go on, sis!" he says. "You look so fixed up in that straw hat, Jack Wakely," she replies, "I can't talk to you half so well as when you are in that rowdy old cap. What made you put on that straw thing just when we were going to tell secrets?"

Jack turns red. "Well, you see, Rhode, I was kind of provoked 'cause papa wouldn't tell me what 'ad.' means, and—and I flung my cap up to sort of emphasize my crossness, and it went up in a tree by the barn, and I didn't have time to find it. Go ahead,—what's the secret? I can listen to you just the same; don't keep a feller waiting all day!"

Rhoda tosses her arms above her head, and settles back into the sweet grass.

"Well, tell me what you know first, Jack. What does 'ad.' mean, and where did you get that word, anyway?"

"Well, the postmaster told me to bring a postal card home to papa, and I read it, 'cause every one reads postals, and I guessed I had a right to, and it said the 'ad.' was done something to. I can't just remember how it went. But I asked papa to tell me, and he was talking with Jem 'bout a lot of old beans, and I got sort of mad, you see, and was going to find mamma and ask her, when I met you on the stairs and—and now you tell me 'bout the secret."

"Well, what do you think, Jack! Mamma says that she and papa have been talking things over, and they've decided that—that it's best to take some one to board here this summer, 'cause there's been something 'bout money matters going wrong, and papa thinks it'll kind of help along if mamma will let some boarders come and use the rooms we don't need much, you see."

Jack looks amazed, and sits bolt upright before his sister.

"And that's the secret!" he exclaims. "That's why mamma looked doleful, and sighed, and there's been such a no end time of fuss and mystery! Well, I say it's a shame! Who wants a lot of strange folks prowling 'bout here? and who wants to be bothered with having to be polite to 'em 'cause they're in our house?"

Rhoda looks reproachfully at her irate brother.

"Jack Wakely, I should think you'd be more—more considering! There, I can't help saying that, if you are my twin!"

Jack gets up and gives vent to his feelings in the usual way,—that is, he flings his straw hat up in the air as high as possible, and

after it has lodged in the branches of the nearest tree, and he has had the trouble of climbing after it, he settles himself again at his sister's side, and listens as she goes on to explain.

"You see, Jack dear, I felt just as provoked as you do, when mamma first told me, but then I was sorry right off when I remembered that that was what had made poor mamma so sad and troubled so long."

"What, 'cause you were provoked?" interrupts Jack, a little roguishly.

"No! 'cause there would have to be boarders," replies Rhoda, "and I don't think you're polite to interrupt me if I do get things mixed. I feel mixed and queer all over, and—and I feel so sorry for mamma, who will have to give up things to those strange people, and they won't know how hard it is for her. And besides, she said I was to be her right-hand man—"

"You ain't a boy," interrupts Jack again, this time with a spice of indignation. "I'm the one to be a right-hand man, not you; and I'll just tell mamma so, too."

Rhoda looks disgusted. "Pshaw, you haven't any sense, Jack Wakely! she means that I am to help her; and she said that if we both did what we could to make things pleasant to the people who came, we would prove ourselves real little comforts to her and papa. And I'm going to do all she wants me to, whether you do or not."

"Who's going to not?" asks Jack, with a flush on his cheek. "Guess I'm going to help her and papa to—to—do what they want to, and I'm going to be her right-hand and her left-hand man, too."

"All right, Jack," says Rhoda meekly, "you may, and I'll help you out. Well, let me see—I guess this is all I know to tell about, but we know the secret of things now, and yet—Jack, I wonder what that word 'ad.' does mean?"

"Yes, and I wonder what Jem was going to send a message to New York for, that day when we were rowing? When we find out what those two things meant, we will be sure that we are as wise as mamma and papa."

"There's papa now, let's ask him!" cries Rhoda, and the twins spring up, racing across the orchard to the garden gate, where they waylay their father and subject him to the severe cross-questioning of their curious little tongues, until they learn at last that "ad." stands for "advertisement," and that Jem had simply driven to the station to send an advertisement for summer boarders to a New York paper.

And having thus acquired "as much wisdom" as papa and mamma, Rhoda and Jack Wakely are filled with a content unknown to them since the morning of mamma's "dreadful sigh," when neither birds nor sunshine could make the loving little daughter quite happy.

CHAPTER III.

THE MOORE FAMILY.



A PLEASANT sitting-room, upstairs, and in the second story of a fine house in one of New York's fashionable avenues. Before a good-sized trunk a boy of fifteen years was kneeling, engaged in the (to him) delightful occupation of packing. His sisters were watching him eagerly. The gentle woman who was putting a few last stitches in one of his shirts was also interested, though she was in no way related to Frank Moore, but was only the house-keeper and trusted confidante of the Moore family. One other interested watcher had been present, but he had been dispatched on an errand, and with all the respect and proper amount of deference due a boy of Frank's imposing years and important prospects from a youngster of ten, Robbie Moore had gladly flown on his errand, and was now hastening homeward lest the



FRANK'S TRUNK WAS PACKED AMID GREAT INTEREST.

packing should conclude before his sharp eyes had discovered each item stored away beneath the trunk's cover.

Frank Moore was going to school, although with the close of June, school-books are supposed to be a drug in the market, and school rules to be ignored for a long vacation. But there are exceptions to every case, you know, and Frank was going from the Academy, which in his own city had "put him through" since his tenth year, to a boarding school situated on the Hudson, and where with other boys of his own age he would study nature as well as books, and be put "through" still further.

His father, a successful merchant, was about to start on a long journey which would keep him absent during the summer. His mother, a delicate woman always requiring tender care and watchfulness, was anxious to secure in some quiet place in the country, as far as possible from city atmosphere and bustle, board for herself and three younger children—Gracie, Mamie, and Robbie.

Thus far no advertisement found in the papers had seemed to give satisfaction, and June was nearing its close so fast.

Frank was to leave for school on the following day. Mr. Moore expected, and hoped to sail for London during the following week. The housekeeper, Mrs. Woods, had planned to make a long visit amongst her own relations, and yet neither Mr. Moore nor the housekeeper could leave home until the mother and her children were fairly decided as to their own summer plans.

This is how matters were standing on the afternoon when the trunk-packing was going on.

"Oh dear me!" wailed Mamie, "how lovely to have a trunk all to yourself, Frankie! Won't it seem nice to look at it and know that you haven't got to ask any one what you shall take out and wear, and all that kind of fuss. I do wish I could have a very own trunk and go away all by my very own self."

"Oh, Mamie! and leave mamma?" from Gracie, who stood at Mrs. Woods's side and watched her brother as eagerly, if less enviously, than Mamie.

"N-o-o! I shouldn't like to leave mamma," was the reply, "but I'd like to feel kind of important like Frankie, you know."

Frank smiled, and thoughtfully stroked the lip where a future mustache would wave one day, he fondly hoped.

"Well, when you grow a fellow of fifteen, you may go off and be a boarding-school boy, too," he said; and then he went on with his packing, trying not to think of how lonely he would surely be without the dear mother and father, the sweet little sisters, and the roguish little Robbie, his devoted brother and copyist—so far as ten years could copy fifteen.

As if in answer to his thoughts, Gracie spoke up: "Frankie dear, though you are so grand and old, don't you kind of feel a little bit like being a baby, and having tears in your eyes because you won't see us all for so long?"

His fifteen manly years could not keep the moisture of feeling from the big brother's eyes. Hastily drawing his arm across his brow, he replied rather huskily: "Never fear, little sis, but Frankie'll miss the whole caboodle of you, and as for the *mater*! Oh! won't I envy the little maidens at home who can kiss her a hundred times a day, if they like! Hello! here's Rob back again! Got the paper, Robbie?"

"Got your paper—your letter-paper, and the 'Mail' for mamma." (The "Mail" was the evening paper.) "She said to bring it to her the minute it came, and I found it on the steps. Where is she, eh?"

Robbie was breathless by the time he had finished this speech, and sat down beside the trunk to recover himself, straightway forgetting his mother's charge concerning the "Mail."

Frank took it from the floor where Rob had dropped it (quite unconscious of the fact that within its pages lay the foundations for the family's summer), and went himself to find the waiting mother.

"Here you are, mother dear," he said. "Rob has just come in, and says you were in a hurry for the 'Mail.' Here it is; shall I go over the summer board advertisements for you?"

"Thank you, dearie; but I am pretty well discouraged about finding just what I want. Either the location doesn't suit, or the terms are not right, or the house is too large, and will hold too

many, or there is a something which doesn't sound attractive to me, at any rate. However, go on, dear."

So Frank read the column down until finally he came to this :

"A family can find comfortable rooms, with plain but good board, at reasonable terms, in Marble Dale, Conn. Plenty of shade about the grounds, and a pretty lake near the house. Boarders are tendered the freedom of the place, and pains will be taken to give satisfaction. Please address Wakely Home, etc."

Frank looked up eagerly.

"There, mamma dear, that reads nicely ; it is a modest kind of thing, and doesn't pretend to do all creation for a boarder, nor hold out all sorts of impossible inducements, nor tell big whoppers concerning mosquitoes and malaria, you know. Shan't you like this advertisement ?"

Mrs. Moore had liked it, and desired Frank to read it once more.

"I'll show it to your father to-night, dear," she said. "I quite agree with you that it has a comfortable sound, and 'Marble Dale' has a kind of cool suggestion about it, that makes me feel as if I should not have to toss about during hot, sleepless nights, when not a breeze can be felt or heard."

"And the rampant insect crawleth and biteth," interrupted Frank laughingly. Then changing his merry tone to one of a graver chord, and bending his young cheek down to his mother's lips, he said caressingly :

"Dear mamma ! how I shall miss you, darling, when I am too far away to hear my name spoken by your dear loving voice ! Mother, I don't think there ever was such a sweet voice in the world as yours,—even when you have to scold your naughty boy."

She put her arms around his neck, and laid her lips upon his fair forehead. Frank had always been a lover-son to his delicate mother, loyally espousing her cause and her side in every discussion, and disputing with his father the privileges of escorting her and waiting upon her here and there, and rendering her such willing, loving services whenever chance afforded, that his father used often to question with serio-comic face and gravity :

"Whose wife is mother, anyhow, I wonder ?"

The mother-heart yearned now over the boy who for the first time was going away from her daily care and watchfulness.

"You will be a true son, Frankie ?" she asked, "and remember that mother's prayers will follow you all through your daily life, and that her thoughts will cling as lovingly to you absent as present ? You will be gentlemanly because your father is a gentleman ; a true, sincere, and thoughtful lad, because your parents have tried to make you so for your own good's sake. You will be a Christian, dearie, because you know that is what you should be, and you will keep yourself as near the everlasting arms, which are above, around, and beneath you, as your earnest and, I trust, continual

prayers, will draw you? You will think of all these things for mother's sake, Frank, while you are away from mother's presence?"

The bright young head bowed itself upon her arm, and a loving kiss upon her cheek was sufficient answer.

Then the father's voice was heard in the hall below, and Frank went down to meet him.

Some errand came up presently to take them out together, and when they returned Frank had several more articles which must be stowed by hook or by crook into the wonderful trunk. They were a few last gifts from his indulgent father, and not the least amongst them was a beautiful writing-desk, all completely furnished, and intended to take the place of the well-worn portfolio which had served Frank so long, and which he supposed would have to serve him yet longer.

All these new purchases must be exhibited to mamma, of course, and Frank started for her room.

Gracie was on the stairs with a small salver in her hand.

"I am taking a cup of tea to mamma, she has such a headache," said the little girl, "and Mrs. Woods coaxed her not to come down to tea."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Frank, knitting his brows, "what's tea without mother! I say, papa!" he called softly, as that gentleman crossed the hall to enter the library, "here's poor mamma laid by

with headache again, and this my last tea at home! Isn't it no end of a shame!

May I say a—
an emphatic
word expressive
of my feelings?"

Papa laughed.
"Go on, my
boy, say it out:
I guess you
won't transgress
the proprieties."

"All right,"
was Frank's re-
ply. Then he
put both hands
to his sides, took
a long breath,
puffed up his
cheeks, and glar-
ing at his sister
with a ferocious
expression, ex-
claimed, "Alas!"



"MAMMA'S HEAD ACHES!"

and subsided into a heap of despair on the step below the anxious Gracie, who had fully expected him to give vent to some dreadfully wicked expression, after those terrible symptoms.

"Is that all you're going to say?" she asked, somewhat disappointed, I fear. "You swelled up as if you were most bursting with rage, and I was going to tell you that poor mamma couldn't help having headache, and I knew she wouldn't like you to use a bad word. You're so disappointing, Frankie!"

"In the right way, little sis, I hope," laughed her brother, following her up the stairs, and peeping into his mother's room.

"Mamma, here's Frank, and he's going to show you some presents papa bought for his good-by, when you're better," explained the little nurse, going forward with her cup of fragrant tea.

A nice nap soon after, and the touch of gentle hands upon the aching head, lifted the pain, and before Frank went to bed that night he had an hour with his mother alone, and learned beside that his father had approved the advertisement from Marble Dale, and posted a reply to it at once.

"And if things are satisfactory you will start for the green pastures right away, mamma?" he asked, "so that I know you are on the right road to health and strength?"

"Indeed, yes, dear, and gladly," was the reply, and after a little

more conversation the mother and son kissed each other for good-night ; and before long the night was well under way with its train of stars and mystic shadows, which were spreading as peacefully over the little house in Marble Dale as over the fine, grand mass of stone and glass which sheltered the Moore family.



CHAPTER IV

PLANS AND MOVEMENTS ON BOTH SIDES.



AMID loving farewells and many embraces from the dear ones he was leaving behind, Frank Moore started for his new quarters on the morning following the events of our last chapter.

The brand new trunk was strapped early, and stood in all its importance of dignity and conscious necessity, awaiting the arrival of the expressman.

Robbie had gazed upon the large, black, shiny letters which initialed Frank's name so finely, until he had nearly exploded with envy. Mamie had stood upon the trunk and by her roly-poly weight had enabled her brother to force the lid down and lock it into place. Gracie had helped him pull the shining new strap about it, and had found a card for Frank to write his full name

upon and tack upon the trunk for greater security of his property, as he fancied.

And now he was at last really gone. His last words had been a husky, though brave, "Good-by, you darling precious mother, father, and sisters, and dear old Rob; Good-by, good-by!" And then he had been driven to the depot, leaving but the echo of his sweet young voice ringing in their hearts for the day.

It was five o'clock on the afternoon of the day before the Moores were to leave their city home and start for the farm in Marble Dale. Letters had been exchanged between the heads of the two families, and Mr. Moore was attracted by the heartiness and honest good will which pervaded the farmer's letters.

"I'm sure you'll be comfortable there, dear wife," he said, "and I can take my journey without anxiety in your behalf. And Mr. Wakely writes that he has a son and daughter of twelve years of age, just the right age to be companions to our children, arn't they? And judging by the tone of his letter, I do not feel in the least afraid that they will be objectional companions either. So now, I'll take you all up there on Wednesday, and then must bid you good-by as soon as possible, and be off across the water."

And now Tuesday afternoon was come. In the recessed window of the family sitting-room, at five in the afternoon—as has been stated—Gracie and Mamie Moore were discussing affairs between themselves. On the morrow they were to start on their

journey, and leaving behind them the little friends whom they liked and had played with for so long a time, and going amongst new scenes and new faces, remain until

papa came home from Europe.

"I ain't sure at all that I'll like that girl and boy up in Marble Dale," said Mamie with a doubtful droop of her pretty mouth. "'Sides that, it's going to be so botheringly lonely 'thout Frankie!"



DISCUSSING AFFAIRS.

"Yes!" from Gracie, very plaintively. "Frankie is so big and

strong, and he does use such beautiful big words that you can't understand, you know, and—and it sounds so dreadfully clever, don't you think so?"

"Y-e-es," doubtfully, "but wouldn't you rather the big words wouldn't be so big you couldn't make your mind reach up to 'em? Frank told me to take care or my digits would be hurt, the other day, and I didn't know where my digits were, you see, and didn't know how to take care of 'em, and—and what do you think! my digits were my fingers, and they were resting on the trunk, and if the cover had fallen they would have been hurt. But I'm glad I know what digit is, anyway."

"But, Mamie," laughed Mrs. Woods, who had come in during the conversation and had heard the digit definition, "digit doesn't apply altogether to fingers, you know. Frankie should have explained a little further, dearie. It is a term applied to any number under ten, and is also a kind of measure—three-fourths of an inch, for instance. You can study it up some day, and go in for a few big words yourself, so as to astonish Frank when he comes home for vacation. Come, are you ready for supper? Hands washed, and faces clean and sweet, and hair all in order?"

The little girls flew off to prepare themselves for the meal, and soon after were summoned to the table.

After that, they busied themselves with going about the rooms taking a last good-by look at the familiar things: the toys they



"GOOD-BY, LITTLE SISTER."

were going to leave behind as being too shabby to introduce amongst new scenes ; the books they had read and re-read, but which were now to be left in peace, and accumulate dust on the nursery book-shelves for so long a time.

Then they went roaming about the parlors, bidding good-by to the beautiful pictures upon the walls, and the pretty fancy articles around them.

But they lingered long before a large portrait which hung over the mantel-piece.

It was the portrait of a golden-haired child probably of four years of age. A pretty, dainty little child whose fair hair, peach-bloom skin and beautiful blue eyes harmonized well with the pale blue of the broad sash about her waist.

"Dear little sister," said Gracie, looking up at the portrait thoughtfully, "we must leave you alone for a long while, and we are so sorry."

"We are going to the country," joined in Mamie, lifting also grave and wistful eyes to the portrait. "And we shall see other little children, maybe, but there won't be any so sweet as you, dear little sister Violet !"

The child on the wall gazed at them out of the depths of eyes which resembled her name, and seemed waiting anxiously to hear more.

"You will be awfully lonely, dearie, darling !" went on Gracie,

longing that she were tall enough to reach her hand to the peachy cheek of the little sister so far above her height, and stroke it lovingly.

"I'm 'fraid you will be awfully lonely without any one to talk to you, and we shall be away so long. But we will take care of mamma, and she will take care of us, and we will come back to you, darling little sister, Mamie, Robbie, and I, and mamma best of all, and we'll always remember that you are waiting for us, and—" "and," interrupted Mamie, "we'll say—we'll tell folks that there are four children of us, only mamma couldn't bring but three, 'cause the littlest sister of us all lives in a frame on the wall, and couldn't come, though we love her best of all of us."

"Why, Mamie Moore," here exclaimed Gracie, "there are five of us children! You forget Frankie!"

"You don't s'pose Frank is a children, Gracie?" replied Mamie, astonished. "Why, he's our big brother, and we count him an extra."

The little sister in the frame on the wall received these parting words gravely, as if she comprehended their sad meaning, and though the little red lips were parted, yet no sound came forth, and by and by the gathering shadows of twilight drew more and more closely about her until finally she faded like a little white spirit out of sight, and Gracie and Mamie crept out of the dark-

ened room into the hall, where Brooks, the respectful man-servant, was just lighting up for the evening.

Later on, after the children were snugly in bed, and Robbie had made sure that his beloved tops (of all colors and sizes) had not been forgotten in the packing of childish treasures, the portrait of the little dead sister was visited again, this time by the mother whose heart held its youngest darling still ever closely and fondly, and a pair of wet eyes—violet eyes like those in the picture—were lifted up in a mute gaze of farewell.

Then over the face of the picture a soft, white lace was drawn, that nothing might mar its beauty during the long, lonely summer weeks, and by and by the parlor door was closed and locked on the outside, not to be opened again until papa himself called his family together again in the fall.

On the next morning there was bustle enough to delight master Robbie at any rate, even though his sisters were a little anxious about leaving the dear home, and the little friends who were at the door to say good-by to them.

The trunks had gone. Mamma and Mrs. Woods were in the former's bedroom. Cook and waitress and John, the man, were lingering respectfully in the hall to bid their mistress and her children good-by, before they, too, started to keep their vacation with friends, and thank their stars that they were getting such an easy summer as half-pay and no work would provide for them.

Gracie, Mamie, and Robbie were ready for the final start as soon as the carriage should arrive, and were wandering about restlessly from hall to hall, wondering what detained mamma.

In the large hall hung the portrait of an ancient dame, one of the Moore ancestors. Robbie had always hated the expression of the stern, haughty face, and the stiff, upright pose of the figure.

"She's forever looking 'hush!' at me," he was wont to say, "and I'm tired of her bossy expression." But now his spirits rose at the thought of the miles to stretch between himself and the silent, severe lips which matched the eloquent gaze of the frowning eyes above.

He paused in his restless strutting to and fro, and looked up at the face with a saucy look in his brown eyes.

"H'm, my great, great, great auntie, you're no great things after all! I could scratch you, if I wanted to, and you couldn't help yourself, not even to scratch back. I can 'sass' you, too, and you can't do anything but just look 'hush!' and I'm so used to that I don't care. I never saw you, 'n' I'm glad of it, and I don't have to love you 'cause your a nancister, that I know of. Papa hasn't ever told me to, anyhow, and—"

"Why, Robbie Moore, ain't you ashamed to be talking so to papa's relation!" interrogated Gracie, as she and Mamie came along just then.

"Don't care!" retorted Robbie, unabashed.

"But," put in Mamie, "s'pose some bad, rude boy some day should stand before our beautiful mamma's portrait, when she was old-fashioned and queer-looking like this, and say such hateful things, and take advantage 'cause she was only a picture and couldn't slap him or anything, and hurt her feelings—that is—if she was alive and had any feelings, and—"

"There now, Mamie Moore, you don't any more know what you're trying to say than—than that portrait does. However, if you're going to worry on account of her, I'll be a gentleman and 'pologize as gentlemen do."

So he pulled off his cap, bowed very low before the maiden of ancient days, and with mock gravity implored pardon in the name of the honored masculines of the tribe of Moores. And by that time the rattling of horses' hoofs and carriage-wheels combined gave notice that it was time for the start, and at that moment mamma and Mrs. Woods appeared,—the latter to take her way to the house of a friend with whom she was to enjoy her holiday; the former to enter the carriage with her children, after she had bidden good-by to the servants, and left her last directions with them concerning the closing of the house, which, as is usual with city people who dwell amongst burglars as we do—was to be put into the care of the district police.

And so at last the Moores and the Wakelys were to be brought



ROBBIE APOLOGIZES.

together, and the result of the "secret" which had so long troubled Rhoda and Jack, yet to be proven.

Papa—Mr. Moore—was to meet his family at the depot, and there he was, sure enough, when the carriage deposited its living freight at the passengers' door.

Robbie was out of the carriage in a jiffy, and with an air of great importance consulted the silver watch which an indulgent auntie had given him on his last birthday.

"I say, my man!" he said to an expressman who was breaking his back and every rib in his body over the heavy trunks he had carted down, "is the depot clock right, do you s'pose?"

The man was tired and cross, and Robbie getting too close to him had trodden on his toes; so he snapped out at his small questioner:

"Get out of the way, you troublesome cornkiller, or I'll pitch you an' your depot time to Jericho together."

Robbie sprang back with crimson cheeks, and confided to Mamie, who had been a startled listener to the rude reply, that "he guessed that man didn't have a watch, poor fellow, and was so 'shamed of it that it made him cross."

Just then papa collected his family and led the way to the cars, and before many minutes the bell rang, the engine snorted, and away towards Marble Dale sped the city-tired family, bound for "green pastures," and summer's unadulterated sweetnesss.



CHAPTER V.

MARBLE DALE AGAIN.



“**H**EW PRESTON!” shouted the conductor through his nose, and with a prolonged wail on the “ton,” as the train drew near the little station set in the midst of the woods, and surrounded by a chorus of sweet sounds from the bird orchestra now in full working order.

“Come along, all of you!” said Mr. Moore, rising and gathering his traps together. “Here we are! Come, Rob, lend a hand here.”

The children looked astonished. "Why, the man said 'New Preston,' papa; I thought we were going to Marble Dale!"

"So we are, Gracie, but Marble Dale is further on, and is after all only a part of New Preston. Only as it had a post-office it had to have a name, and is its own little master or mistress now, as I understand."

"Oh!" said Gracie, and with a look of relief on her face (for to tell the truth she had feared this lonesome-looking place had really been the end of her journey, and she had been looking around for the house which Mr. Wakely's letters had described) she followed her father and mother out upon the platform, and stood close beside her mother while her father gave directions about the baggage.

A real old country stage stood near, and the driver, an honest-faced specimen of a country driver, came forward rubbing his palms together and beaming from ear to ear.

"You the party fur Mabble Dale?" he asked. "I kinder reckoned you be, cos Mister Wakely he told me to look eout fur ye, an' he said there'd be a man an' woman and three young uns, an' a passel o' traps an' sich. Here you air!" He hurried back to the stage, opened the door, politely ushered Mrs. Moore and the little girls inside its roomy accommodations; then grabbing the trunks which had been wheeled near by (and over which Master Robbie kept anxious guard, as though he feared the invasion of

thieves), the driver tossed them up, as though they had been feather-weights, to the stage-rack, saw Mr. Moore and Robbie at last inside the stage, gathered up his reins, flicked his patient horses with the whip-lash, made some sort of peculiar sound through his teeth, and was presently moving on at a jog-trot over the wooded roadway, while his passengers were drawing long breaths of enjoyment of the sweet fragrance all around them.

Old Stephen turned around presently and looked through the window, which was open, between him and his passengers.

"Let's see, I didn't ketch your names!" he said inquiringly.

"Moore," replied the ever-ready Robbie. "Our name is Moore; what's yours?"

"Oh, I'm Steve—old Steve they call me," was the reply, and Stephen settled comfortably back in his seat, crossed one leg over the other, and prepared to enter into a sociable conversation, as Mr. and Mrs. Moore smilingly observed.

"Have you been driving long, Stephen?" asked the lady pleasantly.

"Wal, I've druv over twenty year, an' I'm kinder ust ter the job. Sometimes 'long in the fall o' the year I git laid up a spell with the rhoomatiz, an' a feller takes my place for a bit, but he don't give no great satisfaction, an' I allus tries to git back and ketch a-holt of the reins agin."

"Are you pretty busy during the year?" questioned Mr. Moore.

"Wal, carn't say as I'm special driv in the winter seezing, but I fetch along considerable number of itims in the summer, an' scatters 'em reound in odds an' ends o' places."

"'Items,'" quoted Mrs. Moore in a whisper to her husband; "can he mean passengers?"

Mr. Moore smiled. "Very likely, my dear, very likely." Then to Stephen:

"Mr. Wakely is a very fine man, I believe, and I am glad to leave my little family in his care during the summer. Of course you know him well?"

Stephen crossed legs again, sent a huge quid of tobacco out upon the roadside, much to Mamie's and Gracie's disgust, and replied:

"Know him? wal, I reckon there ain't any one knows him better. There ain't a nicer man abeout these ere parts, sir, nor a trustier man neither. He ain't ever took no boarders afore, an' I reckon somethin' must have driv him to it this time, cos he's allers been comf'terble enough off, an' so fur 's I kin see he's that way now. But ef he chooses to pester himself with cityites a-pryin' reound an' makin' of theirselves to hum in his house—why, 'tain't—"

Here Stephen remembered that his passengers were to be boarders with the Wakelys, and brought himself up roundly. "I ax yer parding, sir," he said, "an' yours, ma'am. I'm sure I warnt meanin' you of course; I was only thinkin' of some other folks as



A SLEEPING, TIRED-OUT LITTLE TRAMP.

boarded in New Preston a spell some time ago, an' raised Cain here with their airs. G'long there!" He flicked his whip-lash over the back of each animal, and relapsed into silence, while his passengers were smothering with suppressed laughter. "So far as I'm concerned, Stephen," said the lady presently, "all the 'airs' I care to have anything to do with will be those which blow over fair green meadows and through fragrant pines, if there are any of the latter near the house."

"Oh, plenty o' sich, ma'am!" replied Stephen, feeling that his rude speech had been forgiven, "plenty o' them, an' as fur medders, lor', they don't cost nothin' to look at fur's your eyes kin see em."

* * * * *

It was two or three days before this that Chloe, going along the road to the pasture-gate, was startled early on an afternoon by discovering a small figure lying face-down before the bars, and as still as though life had left the body.

Inside the field the cows were gathered, full of play, and looking as if they would have liked no better fun than to play ball with the boy outside had it not been for the bars between.

"Laws now, what dat?" said Chloe to herself or the cows, as she paused at a respectful distance from the prostrate stranger, and tried to think if in her book of signs and omens (which I believe most of her race carry with them for the sake of their

superstitious natures), there was anything about the accidental finding of a body alive or dead, prone upon the ground. But she could not recall any line concerning the subject, and therefore ventured nearer to what proved to be only a sleeping, tired-out little tramp.

Chloe's touch awakened him, and he sat up.

"Hello!" said he.

"Laws!" said Chloe, and then they looked at each other.

"What you name?" asked the tramp, and Chloe replied with a question also:

"Who's yo'self, I'd like fer to know?"

"I no tell you till I trus' you," was the reply, with a shake of the tangled head, and a keen glance from the glittering black eyes.

There was an accent in the speech which was new to Chloe, and she suspected the tramp to be some kind of a "furriner."

"Specs you done gone clean crazy," she muttered, moving a little back from him, half afraid of the gaze of the black eyes.

A roguish smile crossed the boy's face. "Specs I no gone crazy," he said, imitating her tone and manner. "You tell me who you is, an' I sure I trus' you, an' I no be scared of your black face any more."

"Laws! I kin tell you'se a furriner, any way," replied Chloe.

"Seen a monkey looked like you once," said he.

Chloe looked up indignantly, and raised her hand as if to give the saucy boy a good box on the ear, as she remembered she had been served when a "pickininny" and too free with her tongue. But the tramp dodged, and Chloe was seized with compassion.

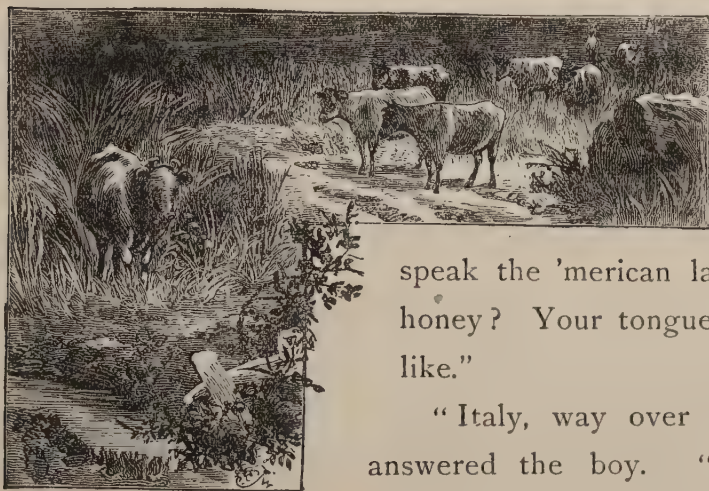
"Hain't gwine ter hit a feller when he's so little," she said, "an' I spec you'se too tired to be perlite, honey. Come now, tell ole Chlo' all 'bouten yo'self, dat's a good chile.'

Thus coaxed, the boy sobered down, and in a few minutes Chloe learned that he had run away from a town many miles distant, where he had been compelled to beg for food, and be a sort of white slave to the miserable woman who had not only himself but several other boys, orphans like him, in her keeping. He had been ill-treated and neglected, half-starved, and kicked and cuffed until he would not stand it any longer, and consequently one dark night he had stolen out of town, running part the distance, and stealing and begging rides, until finally he had reached this place, and having walked a long way had at last succumbed to fatigue and, sitting down by the pasture bars to rest a little, had known nothing more until awakened by Chloe's touch.

Chloe listened to all this with great sympathy.

"An' whar you gwine ter now?" she asked.

"I no care, so's I no see that woman I left behind me," was the somewhat wary reply.



"Whar you born? I wonder!" exclaimed Chloe, "carn't you

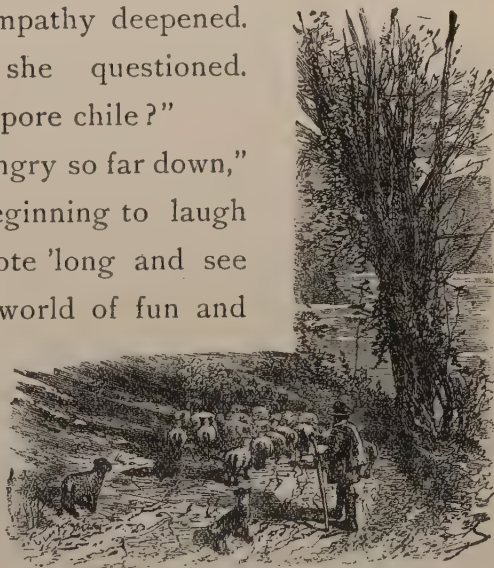
speak the 'merican languidge better, honey? Your tongue's twisted, pears like."

"Italy, way over the blue sea," answered the boy. "Come to this country, tree—five year ago, an' madre

an' padre die here." There was a suspicion of tears in the black eyes, and Chloe's sympathy deepened.

"What's your name?" she questioned. "Ain't you mos' starved, you pore chile?"

"Name's Guilo, an' I'se hungry so far down," pointing to his boots, and beginning to laugh again, as Chloe bade him "tote 'long and see her mistiss." There was a world of fun and sunshine in the little tramp's nature, despite the rags, the hunger, the loneliness and the fatigue, and Chloe was getting more and more interested in him as they walked along the road.



He was full of wonderful "yarns," as she called them, tales of hair-breadth escapes from all sorts of dangers, which she wanted to believe, but could not while he related them with that comical look in his eyes, and a sort of disguised "quiz" in his tones. She wished in her heart that her mistress would keep him on the farm for a while, at any rate, and she herself would make him useful in a hundred ways. Guilo was secretly hoping, also, that some fortunate chance would locate him near this funny black woman, whose kindly nature he had already discovered, and he determined to be on his best behavior when he should be taken before her mistress.

As they neared the farm-yard gate, something seemed to have occurred which was giving Mr. Wakely and Jem considerable trouble, and presently a young colt dashed out into the road and ran at full speed toward Chloe and Guilo, while Mr. Wakely was shouting to Chloe to head him off. But Chloe was too frightened for anything of that sort, so she scampered as fast as her fat limbs would allow, and got over the low stone wall by dint of rolling and climbing together.

Not so with little Guilo. He stripped off his jacket on the instant, and, taking good aim at the colt's head, flung it with all his force at the animal as he came near, and ran forward with waving arms at the same time. But the sudden attack had the effect of wheeling the runaway colt to the right-about, and as he

dashed back over the road, Mr. Wakely and Jem caught him at last.

Then Chloe came cautiously over the wall, and with great satisfaction patted Guilo on his shoulder.

“Lawsy, I knowed you war a brave one, an’ now you’ve done fotched dat animile up fer Marster Wakely. I reckon you’ve did a good thing for yo’self, mine I tole you.”

When they reached the gate where Mr. Wakely was standing she introduced the little Italian lad.

“Here’s a find ob mine, Marster Wakely, one ob de rale smairt pickininnies, sah, and got a heap ob sense in his top-knot, too, as you kin jedge by de fotchin’ up ob dat are disrespeckful animile jus’ now. I foun’ dis boy, sah, down by the parstur’ bars soun’ asleep, an’ he’s on de watch fer to fine a place fer to live an’ take holt ob work.”

Mr. Wakely smiled.

“Is that so? Well, sir,” to Guilo, “how do you do, and where do you come from, and what can I do for you?”

Guilo grinned and twinkled, and replied to the last question first.

“The Signor can give me something to eat. I walk so far, an’ I so tired. An’ I come from far way over the sea, an’ I runned away from bad woman. She no beat me any more.” The black eyes flashed at the recollection of former cruelties, and Mr. Wakely, like Chloe, grew sympathetic. Chloe repeated all that

the little tramp had told her, and Mr. Wakely bade her take the boy to his wife for a talk, after which she was to give him a "good square meal."

"Wonder whar Jack an' Miss Rhody kin be?" remarked Chloe, missing the noise usually about the place when the children were anywhere near.

"Who's Zack?" questioned Guilo, "an' who's Rhoty?"

"Laws, didn't you spec marster 'n' mistress had any chillums?" inquired Chloe. "She am de happy persesser ob two as likely twins as I ever see afore. Right smairt, peart chillums dey are, too, 'n' I oughter know. Specs I ain't done live wid 'em all dese year fer nothin'."

Meanwhile the twins under discussion were enjoying a visit to Lake Waramaug, a beautiful lake but a few miles distant. One of the men had gone down on an errand, and Rhoda and Jack had accompanied him. At this moment, while Chloe was wondering over their absence, the twins were in the hut of an old tar, whose rheumatic back had caused him to give up the sea and turn his hand to fishing on the lake near his native village. He could spin yarns of all lengths and qualities, according to the patience and interest of his hearers, and whether he embellished them with the aid of too vivid an imagination or not, it made no difference in the excitement of the tales, so that to Jack he was a most wonderful man and a great hero.

But if old Tom could conscientiously stretch the truth when relating his yarns of the sea, he was in all other respects a solid, honest, and faithful old seaman, warm-hearted, reliable and trustworthy, and no mother or father feared his influence over their young people, however often they visited him, or how marvelous his tales.

"I'll tell you what, young master and miss,—begging parding for not puttin' the miss fust—when yer as old a man as I be, you'll hev as many tales to tell an' and you'll like to spin yarns as long as your materials will let ye. Did ever I tell ye, now, of the time when I took supper with Miss Lorelie, she that's the famous mermaid ye've hearn tell on, who coaxes sailors down under the waters an' drowns 'em if she don't like 'em?"

"Oh, mamma sometimes sings a song called 'Lorelei,' and it's so pretty!" said Rhoda eagerly.

"Wal, that's the gal! There's been a power o' songs writ about her," gravely replied Tom, turning his "quid o' baccy" over under his tongue, and settling himself more comfortably on his chest. "That's the gal, sure enough! Wal, I was over there, you see, to the right of the mounting, jest where the lake gives a sort of a turn, an' I was kinder leanin' over the edge of my boat, a-wishin' the plaguey fish 'd bite better, when I hearn a soft kind o' singing, an' it was that soothin' I couldn't keep my eyes open, an' found I was goin' to sleep sure pop. Then the next thing I knowed, I was

setting to a table in a beautiful cave with the beautifullest young lady you ever see, with her hair all shinin' an' wavin'-like down her back, an' the bluest eyes ! There was all kinds of fish on the table cooked in various ways, an' the table was made out of a white shining rock, and kep' floatin' and floatin', and the vittles didn't seem to tumble off, neither. Wal, I couldn't keep my eyes offen her, an' she kep' her eyes on me till I was all of a creep, an' says I to her, says I, 'Scuse me, ma'am, haven't I hearn tell o' you afore ?' She smiled, an' says she, ' Yes, sir, I keep a kind of hotel down under the sea where you are now, and I take sailors to board cheap'; an' then she turned an' says to a fish with a whappin' big mouth, ' Dolphin, jus' show this gentleman his room'; an' with that I says, ' You don't mean for to tell me I'm under the sea, ma'am, do you ? Why, I can't possibly stay any longer, I've got other fish to fry.' But she larfed, an' says she, ' I'd like to see you get back ; you'd be the fust that ever did,' and then—what do you think happened ? ”

Rhoda and Jack were listening intently, and in spite of the remarkable doubtfulness of the account, were vastly interested in it, so when old Tom asked his question, Rhoda cried excitedly : “ Oh, what did happen, Uncle Tom ? please go on ! ” and Jack, for all he didn't really believe the yarn, looked as though he would like to have had it a true one.

“ Wal,” continued old Tom, “ a very, ve-ry remarkable thing



"OVER THERE. YOU SEE."

happened. I says to Miss Lorelie, says I, 'Ma'am, I've hearn of you an' your wicked ways, a-drawin' an' singin' of men to their death, while you're a-combin' out your hair a-settin' on the rocks idlin' your time away, when you ought to be doin' somethin' sensibler, but I'll be switched with that ere dolphin's tail if I'm a-goin' to be drawed down to die for sich as you, an' I don't relish so much fish for supper neither,' says I; an' with that—I woke up an' found I'd been sound asleep in the boat, an' a big fish hooked on to my line, strugglin' for dear life. So it was all a dream, children; I hope you warn't thinkin' it really happened? Ha! ha! ha!"

Jack and Rhoda were disgusted.

"You've got to pay us for telling us such a yarn as that, Tom Smith!" said Jack. "Think we would have wasted time listening to you for just a dream? No, sir!"

"Wal, what'll I pay you in?" said good-natured Tom. "I'll do just what you say."

"All right, Tom," said Rhoda, "you shall take us some day in your boat for a whole morning on the lake, and teach us how to troll."

"Aye! aye! my hearties!" was the reply, and soon the children went home.

CHAPTER VI.

EN ROUTE FOR THE FARM.



“HELLO, Rhode, who the scratches is that, I wonder?” Jack pointed to the barn-yard, where his mother was going about amongst the hens and chickens, followed by a little boy whom the children had never seen before.

Rhoda looked where he pointed.

“Why, who is he, do you s’pose, Jack. He doesn’t live around here, I know, ’cause his face is strange.”

The little stranger was carrying

a hen in his arms, and looked as happy as possible, as he and the

lady moved about the yard, throwing crumbs to the chickens which flocked about them.

"Hi! mamma," shouted Jack, tossing his cap in the air, "here we are back again, Rhoda and I. Oh! we've had a jolly good time, and we've had fun with old Tom, and he told us the biggest yarn—"

"Wait, dear boy, until you are a little nearer," interrupted mamma, as soon as the yelling Jack paused for breath. "I can't enjoy your story when it is screamed at me in such a way."

And in a few minutes the little son and daughter were beside her.

Jack stared at Guilo, and Guilo returned the compliment. Rhoda whispered to her mother, "Who's that boy?"

Then Jack went beside his mother and put his arm about her waist, glaring at the stranger as though to say, "You've no right to follow her around, for she's my mother, not yours. Who are you anyway?"

But it was only a second before mamma explained:

"This is a little wanderer who has come to our door, and papa has decided to let him stay and earn his living like a little useful man, and we must be kind to him, because he is a stranger in a strange land. His home is in Italy, and Guilo—that is his name—has not spoken our language very long."

Jack went forward and put out his hand.

"How do, Guilo? I'll be good to you, so'll Rhoda, won't you, Rhoda?"

Rhoda laughed, "'Course I will, if you are," she said, "and 'cause mamma says so, and—'cause I ought to, I s'pose, but"—she went up and whispered in her mother's ear, while poor little Guilo looked quite embarrassed during the silence intervening—"Mamma, are you going to love him as much as Jack? Are you, mamma?"

"Oh, little goosie!" was the laughing answer, "don't fight for your twin until necessary."

Then Guilo was sent to the barn to fetch more corn, and during his absence Mrs. Wakely explained that after a talk with the little tramp, she and papa had concluded not to send him wandering further on, until at last he should reach the city-streets and maybe wander into danger to both tender soul and defenceless little body, but to keep him on the farm and allow him to work at odd errands and easy jobs, helping Jem and Bill, and doing whatever he was told to do about the farm, for his food and home, and she added that the little orphan had seemed so grateful and happy at the prospect of being cared for in such a comfortable home, that he had actually laughed until he cried, and had declared that he would try the very best he knew how, to be good, and useful, and "earn his keep."

"So now," said the mother in conclusion, "I wish you, Jack,

and you, Rhoda, to be generous and kind in your dealings with him, and remember that he is only eight or nine years old, a stranger within our gates, and earning his right to comfort and peace to the best of his small ability. Will you remember this, Jack dear? and Rhoda, my little jealous girl, who was afraid her brother would be robbed of his mother's heart?"

"Oh, mamma!" said Rhoda blushing, "I was a goosie, sure enough: but Jack and I'll be good, truly, to Guilo, (what a queer name!) and if he and Jack fight—"

"What? what's that, dear?" exclaimed mamma, aghast. "Fight! I think unless my boy wants to spend a day in his room, he will think twice before doing anything of that sort."

Jack turned on his heel. "H'm, as if I would; but"—and his face lighted up, "I'll bet a cooky I'd be the one to beat in a fight, 'cause—'cause I've the strongest arms, and I'm the biggest, too!" His mother turned away, but it was well that Jack didn't see the twinkle of a smile on her face, which it was impossible for her to keep back, even under the reproachful glance she had tried to bestow upon her roguish little laddie.

* * * * *

To return to our travelers, whom we left jog-trotting over the road in Stephen's rattling vehicle.

They had accomplished some few miles, and were nearing the direct road now, which led straight on towards the Wakely

home. The children were restless, and tired of sitting still so long.

"Oh, mamma, papa, do let us get out and just run! we will keep you in sight, or you can keep us in sight, and we are just as tired and crampy as we can be!" they exclaimed at last.

"Any danger of their getting lost, Stephen?" asked Mr. Moore. The man shook his head. "Wal, no, I guess not. It's straight enough right on ahead till you come to the big gate that leads to the grounds of the Wakely home. Young folkses is like colts, they want to run free. Let the critters go, sir; I'll go bail fur 'em."

He winked at Robbie, and smiled at the girls, and "whoa!" at the nags before him.

"What do you say, mamma?" questioned Mr. Moore, looking at his wife.

"I say whatever you say, my dear," was the smiling answer.

"Very well, then, youngsters, clear out with you, and stretch those restless little legs. But don't wander off beyond our knowledge of you."

With a joyous whoop, Robbie sprang out of the stage, followed by his sisters, and away they ran up the road laughing and shouting in high glee until they were soon out of sight, but, as Stephen insisted, "all safe, sartain sure!"

At first the children could not get enough of the wild flowers

which grew along the road, and they climbed banks, went over fences, and down into gullies in search of them. And then they grew wearied of carrying the accumulation of blossom and leaf in their hands, and so flung them away along the road as signs of their near presence, which the mother and father in the stage were glad to see here and there as they followed on.

But pretty soon, almost unconsciously wandering apart, they became separated, and presently Robbie and Gracie found themselves in a field some distance from the roadway which they had left in order to chase a squirrel "just one minute" only.

Mamie was nowhere visible for the reason that she was pulling daisies in a lane which had suddenly opened before her. When she, too, realized the fact that she was quite alone, she discovered, as Robbie and Gracie had, that the roadway was not so easy to find, and by the time she succeeded in finding it there was no sign of the stage, or of her brother and sister.

To sit down and cry was Mamie's first thought. She felt so lonely and frightened, poor little girlie, and worse than that, she knew mamma and papa would be worried also.

It happened, however, that those in the stage supposed the children to have gone on far ahead, and they were in no wise anxious about them as yet.

Robbie and Gracie were as troubled as Mamie was, but at least they had each other, and could fret and be frightened together.

They finally climbed a fence which let them out upon a road leading somewhere, of course, but where, they were unable to form the least idea.



GRACIE AND ROBBIE.

in the stage. We'll be all lost and tired, and mamma will cry for worry!"

"Never mind, we're in for it, Gracie, and we can get out of the scrape by and by, if we stick to the business of trying," said Robbie bravely, but feeling much like giving vent to his feelings and being a girl-boy.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" moaned Gracie, "if we had only stayed

"Come 'long, you old 'fraid-cat, and let's cut along this road. We'll bring up somewhere, never fear, and Stephen said the Wakely home was right straight along, and this road must be somewhere near it, on one side or the other. Come, hurry up!"

They "hurried up" and sure enough it wasn't very long before they reached a gate which seemed to be in the rear of a garden, and beyond the garden they could see the outlines of a house.

"Let's go in here and ask the way!" said Gracie, pulling Robbie towards the gate.

"All right," said he, "but, I say, Gracie, don't you think we'll catch pins and needles when mamma and papa catch *us*? We haven't got the leastest speck of an excuse either, 'cept we say the squirrel enticed us."

"Oh, Robbie! what a coward! I guess I shan't shelter my naughtiness behind a teenty little squirrel that didn't want to be chased. No, sir! we just simply forgot, and left the road, and—and—oh dear!" she wailed, "I wish we hadn't done it, Robbie Moore!"

"Anyway, where's Mame, I wonder?" exclaimed Robbie.

"Oh, of course she's been picked up in the stage by this time, and I 'spose they all think we're only just gone ahead. Oh dea-r-r!"

They opened the gate at last, and went up the long path, under



GRETCHEN.

trees, and past all kinds of old-fashioned flowers, until they drew near the house, and could see a little girl standing in the shelter of some bushes with a large and beautiful cat in her arms.

And while they stand looking at her, we will return to Mamie.



CHAPTER VII.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.



WE left Mamie deliberating as to whether it would be worth while for her to sit down and cry over the forlornness of her position.

There were several reasons why she should not do so. One was because it would delay her just so many minutes in the search for the right road after the stage (for there

seemed to be a sort of fork in the road where she had gotten out of the lane, and she had not observed it when entering the lane, she was sure).

Another reason was that there was no one present to comfort her, or wipe away her tears, if she even cried her eyes out.

A third and very good reason was that it wouldn't do the least atom of good, nor show her how to go any the better. So she

concluded to postpone her crying for a more convenient season, and meanwhile she would plod along bravely, trusting to a kind fate to turn her into the right path.

"I s'pose Rob and Gracie are as comfortable as can be, in the stage now. And oh, dear, how dreadfully tired I am! Mamma 'll think I've run ever so far ahead of the stage, and just as likely as not Gracie and Robbie 'll be mad at me, 'cause they'll think I ran away on purpose to tease 'em."

With that thought, the tears sprang to Mamie's eyes quickly, and a couple of very bright ones escaped control of the white lids and rolled down over her cheeks.

She wiped them away with her dusty little hand, and went along a path which she presumed to be right, but which proved to be the one entirely wrong, as Mamie found out ere long.

She walked on and on, and finally ventured to ask a little boy whom she met :

"Is this Marble Dale, if you please?"

He looked at her out of a pair of blue eyes, noticed the little streak of dust and dried tears on her face, and pityingly replied :

"No, this is Waramaug village. Marble Dale's where I live, and I'm going there now. Shall I show you the way?"

"Yes, I thank you!" was Mamie's gentle reply, though she was very shy, and felt quite embarrassed in the presence of a strange boy.

They walked along together without speaking a word, until finally the boy grew tired of the silence, and decided to make a remark, which he did after a fashion of his own :

"I say, little girl, you've got dirt on your cheek."

Mamie blushed furiously, and put up her hand to brush it off, thereby making a bad matter worse.

The boy laughed, not meaning to be rude or unkind.

"Now you've made it a pretty sight," said he.

Mamie saw the twinkle in his eyes, and knew he was not being unkind, so she smiled back.

"I s'pose I am dusty all over my face," said she, "'cause I'm lost, and I've been going all around trying to find the right way."

"Right way where?"

"To Marble Dale, you know."

"Oh, yes! Where do you live in Marble Dale?"

"I don't live there yet, but we're going to stay there all summer."

"Oh, are you? Well, I live in Marble Dale, and it's a jolly place too. I've got a lovely home, and a no end good fun sister, and a boss father and mother. But—" he drew nearer to Mamie and assumed a confidential tone—"I'll tell you an honest truth, and that is, my mother and father are just going to spoil our place and put themselves to lots of fuss and trouble, 'cause

they're going to take boarders, and I think it 'll be horrid, don't you?"

Mamie didn't exactly know what to reply, so she thought a minute, and then—

"I don't know, but—but we're going to board in Marble Dale, and I hope we won't make it horrid for any one."

"Are you? Who you going to board with?"

"Mr. Wakely and his wife and his little girl and boy."

The boy, who was none other than Jack, opened his eyes, turned a fiery red from chin to forehead, and bolted behind a tree at the roadside.

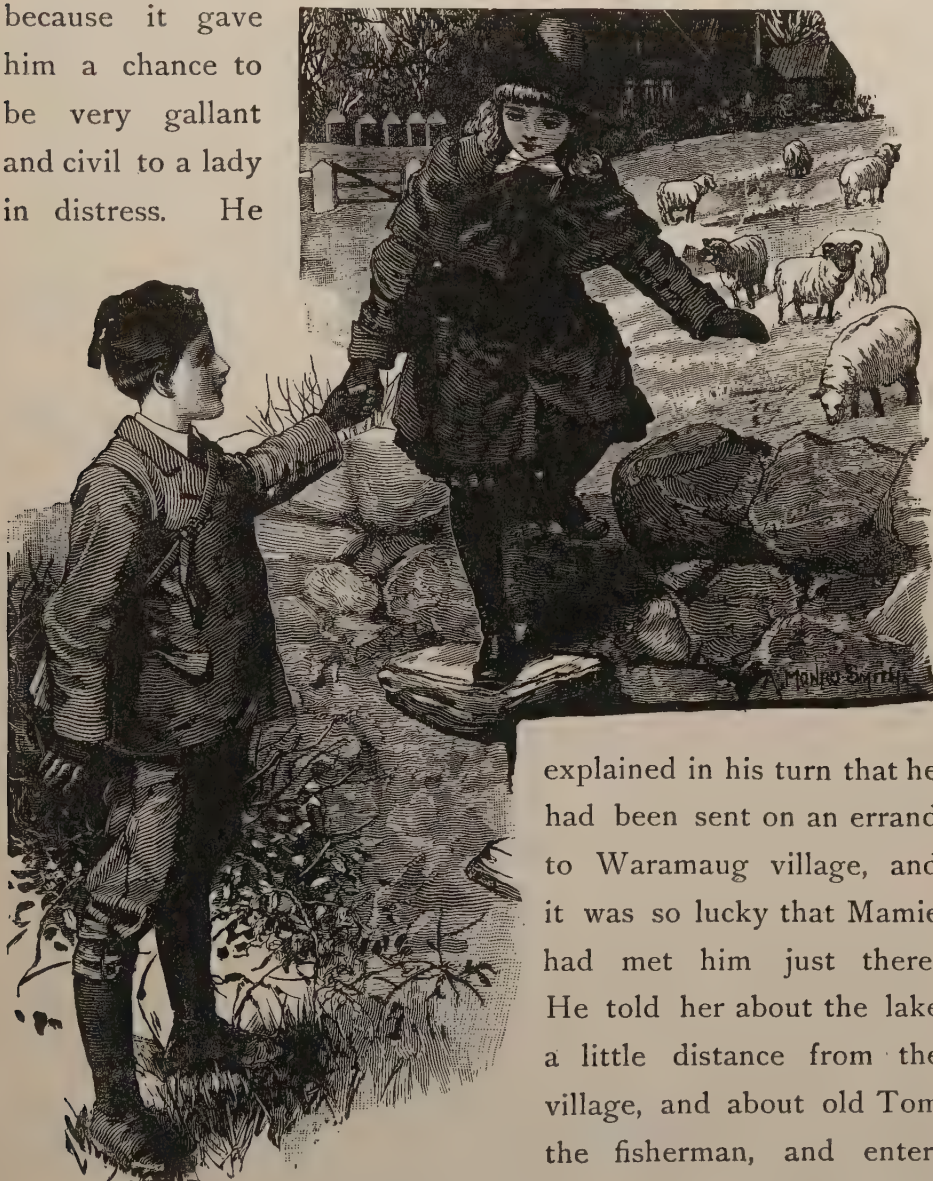
To think of what he had said right to the face of one of his mother's boarders! Oh, how he did feel! But Mamie spoke again:

"Do you know Mr. Wakely?"

"H'm, yes, I—I—know 'em—I—" the crimson flushed up again, redder than ever, as he made a tremendous effort, and blurted out: "See here, little girl, I'm the 'shamedest feller that ever was, 'cause I said that 'bout taking boarders, for I—I—Mr. Wakely's my father, you see, and—and I—"

"Oh, you're Jack, then?" exclaimed Mamie. "Why, I'm awfully glad. Robbie said he knew he'd like you 'cause your name was Jack, and that's a jolly-sounding name." Then she went on to explain how it happened that she was separated from her family, and Jack politely declared he was glad of it,

because it gave him a chance to be very gallant and civil to a lady in distress. He



explained in his turn that he had been sent on an errand to Waramaug village, and it was so lucky that Mamie had met him just there. He told her about the lake a little distance from the village, and about old Tom the fisherman, and enter-

tained her with a repetition of the wonderful mermaid yarn, exaggerating it considerably in order to see her eyes open wider and wider.

And so they were nearing Marble Dale fast, getting better acquainted as children will, until finally Jack said: "If we cut across this field and climb that wall over there, we'll save a good distance. But girls are no good for climbing, and so I s'pose you'd rather walk the road."

Mamie waxed a little indignant. "Guess some girls are good for climbing. I ain't afraid the leastest atom. You just lead the way."

So Jack led the way, and gallantly assisted his little companion over the wall, thinking, as he looked at her, what a dainty little miss she was, and feeling the crimson tide flood his face again with the remembrance of his brusque speech a little before. And finally he exclaimed with a burst of hearty enthusiasm: "I say, you're splendid! If all your folks are like you I'm awfully glad, I tell you, that mamma decided to take boarders."

Mamie looked pleased, and replied: "Oh, my sister Gracie is ever so much better'n I am, and my brother Robbie is too splendid for anything. My mamma and papa are sweet, sweet, sweet, and oh, if you could see our big brother Frank! He isn't here with us, because he's a boarding-school boy, and he wears long pants, and talks big words, and--" here her face grew grave, "we

have a little sister at home who couldn't come with us, 'cause she's on the wall."

"On the wall!" exclaimed Jack, "what in the world do you mean?"

"Why, she's only a picture, but she lives in heaven, you know," was Mamie's grave reply. "But we love her just the same, and she's one of us, too, just the same. Gracie and I tell her things just as we tell each other secrets."

Jack didn't know what to say to all this, though he felt like giving a long whistle of perplexity. But he knew that would hardly be civil, and he liked his new friend too well already to risk giving offense.

So he told her all about Rhoda, and their twinship, and of the good times they had together; and of the lake, and the pretty little boat which they had named the "Lily-pad." And he told her about Guilo, the little Italian wanderer, and how he had come to them, and of his funny broken English. And so they finally came in sight of the farm at last.

"There's old Stephen, the stage driver, coming this way," said Jack. "I guess he's left your family at our house, and we must hurry, 'cause your mother'll be wild with worry now that she finds you're not there. She'll think you're lost."

Mamie could hardly help screaming, as she thought of it all. But she broke into a run and did not pause until she was safe at

her mother's side. Jack stopped to speak to Stephen, and learned from him that the parents were frightened and perplexed at the disappearance of their children, and yet, "as I told 'em," continued Steve, "they ain't in no danger. Some one's bound ter find the critters an' fetch 'em along bime-by. Laws, you carn't git losted reound these parts. G'long!" with a shake of the reins and a chirp to the horses, and in another moment Jack was bashfully drawing near the piazza where the new-comers were standing in conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Wakely.

"Oh, they'll be along presently, my dear Mrs. Moore, don't be troubled about them," Mrs. Wakely was saying. "They will be sure to ask the right direction, and Rhoda here shall go down the road to watch for them." So Mrs. Moore and Mamie, who had been much astonished at not finding her brother and sister with mamma after all, went up to their rooms, but Mr. Moore walked along with Rhoda, and kept a sharp lookout for the runaways.

And now we will go back to them, as they stand in the garden under the trees watching the little girl and her cat.

She was a little German *mädchen*, and her blonde hair hung in braids down her back.

She lifted her eyes presently, and saw Robbie and Gracie watching her.

She nodded smilingly, and went forward to meet them. "Can

you not sit you down?" she asked, pointing to a garden-seat near by.

Robbie shook his head. "Oh no indeed! what we must do is to find out the way to a house where Mr. Wakely lives, 'cause we're going to board there, and we've been lost, and mamma and papa like as not are worried about us."

The little girl looked troubled and full of sympathy. "Oh, yah! I see. I so sorry! but"—and her face lighted up—"I show you the way. You follow shust as I tell you vere to go."

"That's good," replied Gracie. "Thank you, little girl"; giving Robbie a nudge she whispered, "Why don't you thank her too; you ought to."

So Robbie said "Thank you," with one of his most polite bows, and asked the pleasure of knowing her name.

"Gretchen Sterne vas my name," she replied, showing a row of white and pretty teeth; and then she led the way through the garden, past the little house where she and her mother lived, and out upon a road in front. Then she turned and pointed up the road.

"You shust go along straight as ever vas, an' by an' by you sees a clump of trees as vas standing around a brown house, an' that vas Herr Wakely's farm, an' you shust knock your hand to the door an' the black vomans she open to you. Good-by to you, leetle girl an' boy."

She smiled again, and Robbie and Gracie waved their hands to

her for a second good-by when they had reached a little distance, and turned back to find her watching them.

"Tell you what, she's a pretty girl for you," said Robbie, who adored a pretty face, and declared that when he was a man he would marry no one who didn't look like his sisters, for they were pretty enough for any husband.

Well, they trudged along, and pretty soon Gracie said with a sort of resigned sigh :

"If I wern't kind of sorry for worrying mamma and papa, I should be glad we were lost, shouldn't you, Robin? 'cause, you see, we've had some fun, and we've got to know the little German girl, too. I hope we'll often see her, don't you?"

"I mean to, if mamma don't mind," was the sturdy reply, as Robbie's hand came down on his knee by way of emphasis, "she's got lovely teeth, and she talks so queerly, and she's so no end pretty. Hello ! what's that ? Hear it ?"

Gracie did hear indeed, as might any one else who possessed a pair of hearing ears.

It was a loud and vigorous horn-tooting which she and Robbie paused to listen to, and it seemed to come from a field near at hand, in which some grain had grown tall and thickly.

Robbie climbed a fence, and presently discovered a little chap who was flourishing a stick, and blowing a tin horn with all the strength of his little body.



GUILO WAS BLOWING THE HORN LUSTILY.

"Hi! what's the matter with you?" shouted Robbie. "Got a cramp?"

The boy turned a pair of black eyes to Robbie, and removed the horn from his red lips.

"I no got crampy, oh no, but I fright de birds away. Birds no eat grain while Guilo scare 'em."

"'Guilo'? What a queer name! Where do you live?"

"Right here with Signora Wakely. I'se chore boy, an' I work for 'em all."

"'Wakely'?" repeated Robbie. "I say, Gracie, here we are, close by the house; this chap works here with the Wakelys, he says. Let's get him to take us a short cut there."

So Guilo was induced to leave his present occupation, and lead the way to the house, and in a few moments Mr. and Mrs. Moore received their young truants with open arms, and—it must be confessed—reproachful faces. Explanations were given, contrition expressed, and forgiveness asked and granted; and then, as the supper bell rang, our family from the city went down and were presently made acquainted all around.

And thus ended—for the tired children, Gracie, Mamie, and Robbie, who went to bed right after tea, the first day of Marble Dale experience for them.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHICH TELLS OF VARIOUS DOINGS.



DAYS passed by, and the two families at the Wakely Home had found no reason as yet to regret having been brought together.

The children had become friends and good comrades at once. Rhoda rejoiced at the companionship of two little girls like Mamie and Gracie, while Jack found Robbie "no end of fun," as he expressed it. Guilo was interested in all the other children did, and whenever he found a chance from Jem's almost too constant supervision (which kept the little chore-boy busy with numberless small jobs here and there), he would be present at the games and plays enjoyed by the boys and the girls as well, and hang admiringly on the outer edge of the circle until perhaps Jack good-naturedly called him to "come along, and take hold with us."

Those invitations were never declined by Guilo, you may be

sure, and he had made himself popular by his nimble ways, and sweet-voiced accent, which was fascinating to Mammie and Gracie at any rate. There had been a speedy introduction to Jack's boat, the "Lily Pad" (during the second day, in fact), after the arrival of the Moores, and since then hardly a morning passed when the little boat was not floating about the lake with its merry freight of laughing children. Jack's pony had also been introduced, and Robbie was learning from Jack to



be quite a fearless rider. Rhoda and her pet robin claimed much of Mamie's and Gracie's time, and Mrs. Moore and Mrs. Wakely enjoyed frequent tete-a-tetes in the shaded corner of the piazza, after the hostess's duties were well disposed of for the day. Mr. Moore had returned at once to the city, after seeing his family completely settled, and feeling that in the choice of their summer home they had indeed done well and wisely.

And now June was gone at last, and July was well under way.

The country was looking charming as far as eye could reach over the fertile meadows and fair green pastures to the mountain range in the distance. Mrs. Moore was gaining steadily in health, and her children had already changed their fair white complexions for a host of freckles, and several coats of pretty brown tan, much to their delight, because Rhoda and Jack were so, and it seemed the proper condition and appearance for country life, in their opinion.

One lovely afternoon, as Mamie and Gracie were swinging and enjoying themselves, while waiting for Rhoda to finish helping her mother about something, a pleasant-faced young lady approached, and with a smile asked if she should help them in their fun. Mamie looked at Gracie, and Gracie looked at Mamie, but neither did as the other hoped, and "spoke first."

And so finally the lady said: "Perhaps I ought to introduce myself to you, my dears, and then you won't feel strange with me. I am Miss Annie Garland, and I am the school-teacher in the little red school-house at the foot of the hill."

Gracie and Mamie smiled, and Gracie said politely:

"How do, Miss Garland? This is my sister Mamie, and I am her sister Gracie."

Miss Garland laughed merrily.

"Well, now we are well ac-

quainted, aren't we?—and I will give you a swing—a long



"SWING ME STANDING UP?"

push'—as the children say, and then go on to the house. Is Mrs. Wakely at home, do you know?"

"Yes'm, she's making cake in the kitchen, and Rhoda's helping her 'bout it. Mamie and I are just waiting here till she comes out again, and then we're going to read a fairy story. Please will you swing me standing up?"

So Miss Garland took hold of the rope and gave Gracie a "start," and then after Mamie had her turn she bade them good-by and went to find Mrs. Wakely.

Pretty soon Rhoda came out with a gleeful face, and quite breathless with the excitement of something she had to tell.

"Oh, girls, I've got a beautiful thing to tell you. Guess what's going to happen! We're going on a picnic to the lake in a few days. Miss Annie says school finishes to-morrow. (Jack and I haven't been for ever so long, and I think she's awfully nice to include us, don't you?) and she's going to have a picnic for a wind-up; only the picnic can't come off till Thursday. But won't it be fine! Where are Jack and Robbie?"

"Jack wanted Robbie to go to the meadow brook and catch tadpoles, and mamma was afraid Robin would get his feet wet, 'cause you know he had a touch of sore throat last night, but he coaxed so hard, and said his throat was all well to-day, and promised not to wet his feet the leastest bit, so they've gone. Come on, Rhode, let's get the book. Come, Mame!"

Mamie hopped out of the swing, and the three little girls went hoppity-hop and skippity-skip off to Rhoda's favorite nestling place, which you will remember was up in the hay-loft in the cosy old barn, discussing, as they went, the delightful news concerning the picnic.

Meanwhile, what of Jack and Robbie?

They reached the brook, and began catching the wriggling tadpoles, though neither boy knew for what special purpose the poor creatures were drawn out of the water. I don't suppose they realized that they were being thoughtlessly cruel, nor would either of them have willingly injured a fly. But the fascination which a tadpole—hideous looking objects as they are!—inspires in boys, is beyond the "ken" of a grown person, so no use to speculate concerning it.

Jack and Robbie were enthusiasts in the business, at any rate, and the pail of water beside the bank was alive with the tadpoles before very long. Then Jack pulled off his shoes and stockings, and went in wading, advising Robbie to do the same. Robbie by this time had forgotten everything but his desire for fun, and in an instant he was beside Jack, splashing and dashing in the rippling waters, and heedless of the fact that he was getting wet above his knees in a way that augured ill for sore throat and perhaps worse.

But conscience awoke at last, and with a bound Robbie



"OH, TO THINK THAT I SHOULD HAVE DONE IT!"

was out of the water and had flung himself face down upon the grass.

"What the scratches is the matter?" exclaimed Jack, amazed, and following after Robbie.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Robbie, covering his face with a very dirty and wet pair of hands, "to think that I should have done it! Oh dear me!"

Something very like tears was in his voice, and Jack began to feel frightened. "What on earth have you done, Robbie Moore? Why don't you tell a feller?" He was a very sympathetic little chap, this Jack of ours, and down on his knees at Robbie's side he dropped, to try his powers of soothing. "I say, did it hurt? What bit you, old feller? Say, Rob! Come, Rob, let me help you if I can,—do!"

But Robbie shook his head, and wiped the tears, which he was too manly to shed, from his lashes.

"Oh, 'tain't anything that's been and bit me! 'tain't anything that's hurt any part of me, 'cept just my heart, and—and—oh Jack, I've told mamma a story! I never tell stories, and she can always trust me, but oh! I've told one now, and I'm so ashamed to go home! I promised I wouldn't wet my feet, and I've done it."

"Will you be punished, Robbie?" asked Jack with a grave voice, and face to match. "Will you be kept in the house, or

catch a whipping or anything? Say, Robbie, will you, do you s'pose?" Robbie sat up and looked at Jack.

"Oh no, no! seem's if I wouldn't be so sorry if mamma would get even with me, and give me a good right-down licking; I'd feel as if we were all quits, then, and—and I'd be paid off fair and square, and wouldn't bother any more about it. But—oh, Jack—you see mamma trusted me, and I broke my word. I must go right home and tell her that I'm sorry, and I shall not feel happy until she says 'I forgive you, dear.' Does your mother get mad with you and punish you, Jack, when you disobey her?"

Jack looked serious, as if the question was too much for him. But he replied honestly: "Well, sometimes I'm extra bad, and then mamma punishes me in a way that's no end worse than a whipping, it makes a feller feel so mean."

"What does she do?" questioned Robbie.

"Well, she doesn't kiss me for a whole day," replied Jack, "and I tell you what, that hurts!"

"Yes," replied Robbie, "course it does. You see, Jack, I don't mind things that hurt us outside so much, though I should kind of hate to be whipped, but it's the inside hurts that I can't bear. The kind of feelings that make stones in your heart, you know, and when I have troubled mamma, I always feel heavy here," laying his hand on his heart, and sighing deeply; "and, Jack, I know you're just the right kind of a boy for me to

be friends with, 'cause you love your mother too, and—and you ain't the least bit of a girl-boy either.—Oh, do let's hurry home."

So they went home over the fields, and when near the house, Rhoda and the other girls met them. Jack called Rhoda away, and together they walked down to the lake, she telling him about the picnic, and he telling her how badly Robbie was feeling, while at the same time Robbie and his two sisters were walking slowly towards the piazza, the little girls listening sadly as their brother was confessing his fault, and screwing up his courage to tell it to his mother.

"There's mamma, now," cried Mamie presently, pointing to the garden path, up and down which a lady was pacing with a book in her hand.

"Yes, run ahead, Robbie, and don't be afraid. 'Tisn't likely mamma'll scold the leastest that ever was. Go on, quick, now." This from Gracie, who gave the little boy a push to help him start.

But Robbie dreaded the confession. There seemed no kind of excuse for his disobedience, and he knew that he deserved punishment, whether he received it or not.

Presently, however, he moved forward, and in a shaky little voice called, "Mamma! mamma! dear mamma!" His mother lifted up her eyes from her book and beheld her little son coming towards her.

"Why, my child!" she exclaimed, "how you do look! what is the matter with you?"



"THERE'S MAMMA NOW."

Poor little Robbie approached nearer.

"Mamma, I want to tell you something very dreadful that I have done. But first just tell me that you know I *mean* it when I say I am sorry." Then he went on to relate the tale of his disobedience, and while they were talking his mother led him up to his room and shut the door, so that what passed between them my little readers may not know.

But that Robbie was forgiven, and happy again, was proved by the fact of his wearing a bright face at supper time, and Jack and Rhoda exchanged glances, which meant from the former, "Now you owe me a big 'Gibraltar,' 'cause he wasn't kept upstairs after all."

I should explain this by saying that poor Rhoda had been so sorrowfully sure that a punishment awaited Robbie (notwithstanding he himself had no fear of it), that she and Jack had "bet" each other a big Gibraltar—which was a ridiculous kind of candy sold at the post-office store—over the discussion. And now Rhoda found herself the loser, after all.

Well, she would pay the "bet" with all the pleasure in the world, the very moment papa gave her her weekly ten cents for spending-money; and I may say right here that it was not many days before Jack was munching his "Gibraltar" with great satisfaction.

* * * * *

During all these days of pleasure, it must not be supposed that

Robbie and Gracie had given no thought to the little German girl who had been so civil to them on the day of their arrival in Marble Dale. Oh no ! they had thought a good deal about her, and had asked the Wakelys all about her, too. They had learned that the little Gretchen lived all alone with a widowed mother and little baby brother who had never seen his father : and that she was a good, thoughtful little *mädchen* who worked about the house and the little garden attached, helping the mother take care of and make ready for market the nice vegetables she could raise on her place. Gretchen didn't have much time for play, but when she did get a chance at it, she knew how to make the most of that chance. She knew how to spin, too, and how to knit her own and baby's stockings, and Gracie and Robbie, indeed all the children, thought her a very clever little maiden.

They had all intended going to see her some day, but as yet there had seemed so much else to do, and there were so many walks to be taken, that the call on Gretchen was still a future pleasure.

However, now that there was to be a picnic, Mamie and Gracie were seized with an impulse to ask if Gretchen might also join in the good time.

The two mammas were quite willing, and Robbie and Jack scampered off to Miss Garland's house to ask her opinion of the matter. She was glad to observe the spirit of kindness in the

young hearts, and gave a cordial consent that the busy little German girl should be asked to join the picnic party,

The next thing in order was a call upon Gretchen with the invitation. And so one afternoon, just at the "cool of the day," our five children, Jack, Rhoda, Mamie, Gracie, and Robbie, set out on their walk to the "little German cottage"—as Jack called it.

The sun was sinking low down in the western sky, leaving a beautiful crimson glow behind it, which, touching the mountain-tops with its radiance, crowned them with a beauty they had not worn even during the brightest hours of the long summer day, and Gracie, lifting her soft blue eyes to watch the glorious sunset, whispered to Mamie softly :

"Oh, look ! see the sky, the hills, and everything that is so lovely ! Oh, Mamie, do you s'pose dear little sister sees those colors all the time up there in God's own world, where the beautiful glory is made for us here on the earth ? Do you s'pose so, Mamie ?"

Mamie nodded a decided affirmative.

"Why, Gracie Moore, of course I s'pose it ! Don't you know God just lives in light and beauty ? Mamma has told us and told us that. What we see here is only what kind of leaks out through the sky, you know. Oh yes, little sister's got the advantage of us so far as that goes, you may be sure, and—and—I



THE LITTLE MAIDEN OPENING THE BARN-DOOR.

shouldn't wonder if that's what makes up for her not being with all of us, and seeing mamma every day, you know."

But now they came in sight of Gretchen's home, and there was the little maiden herself, just opening the barn-door, while her sheep were gathered about her expectantly, and one little lamb was bleating, like an impatient child, for its supper.

"Hi! hello! hey, Gretch!" shouted Jack, who never, if he could help it, wasted time in giving a whole name.

"Hi!" repeated Robbie, never behind his crony an instant if he could possibly keep up to time.

And "Oh, Gretchen! we're coming!" shouted the little girls across the pasture fence,—and what with all the noise and calling, Gretchen couldn't help hearing at last.



CHAPTER IX.

THE CALL UPON GRETCHEN.



HE turned around, and showed her visitors a happy, smiling face, and a row of white little pearls between her parted lips.

"Oh, it vas you!" she said cheerily. "I vas so glad for seeing you again," to Robbie and Gracie. And then she waited demurely for an introduction to Mamie. Rhoda and Jack she knew already, and when Robbie, pulling Mamie forward by her sleeve, said, "Say, Gretchen, this is my other sister; her name is Mamie; she's a nice girl, just as nice as Gracie," the little German girl put out her small, sun-burned hand, and said very prettily,

"I vas glad to see you, too. How you vas feeling to-day?"

Mamie replied that she was "pretty well, thank you," and then

Gretchen invited them in (for by this time the visitors were standing by the barn) to see her sheep.

The animals were a little timid, and Robin could not persuade the lamb to let him lift it in his arms. So when he tried to do so by force, the dam resented such treatment of its offspring, and ran at Robbie in such a way as sent that young man sprawling on the barn floor at Gretchen's feet.

She helped him up, and with a flame on both cheeks the indignant boy rushed at the dam and attempted to give her a taste of his doubled-up fists. But a second time the sheep came out best, and Robbie ruefully rubbed the bump on his head which was the result of too sudden and too hard contact with the floor again.

"You vas better not to make cross the sheep," said Gretchen gently, and with a look of concern on her face as she felt the swelled spot on her visitor's curly head. "She vas not so gentle as vas usual, I think." Then she invited them into the house to see her mother, a placid-faced, fair-haired woman, with eyes like pale violets, and a general air of resignation to circumstances, of whatever kind they proved to be.

The children bethought themselves of the real cause of their visit, and told Gretchen all about it, asking her to join them.

She looked at her mother, wondering if she could be spared for a whole, long, glad day of nothing but pleasure. There were so many things to be done, and the baby to be amused so that mother

could go at the ironing, and the vegetables were to be attended to out in the little garden, and this, that, and the other thing to be done. She was afraid she could not be spared conveniently.

But the mother smiled and nodded: "Oh, yah, yah, you vas a goot girl and vas deserving of some goot times. And so you vas make ready to go to the picnic."

Gretchen was delighted, and so were the other children, and it was arranged that she was to be ready and waiting at her gate for their wagon, which would pass there at such an hour on Thursday, and take her up.

"Now we must go," said Rhoda, "it is near tea-time. Come, Jack! Come, Rob! Gracie, what are you looking at over there?"

"Yes, what is it?" added Mamie, seeing the expression on her sister's face which the little girl always wore when looking at a picture or any scenery that pleased her. Gracie was very fond of pictures, and would linger long before one, though Mamie was often contented with a hasty glance.

"I am looking at this lovely picture!" replied Gracie, as Rhoda and Mamie drew near.

The picture hung on the wall over the little sofa. It was only a cheap, colored print, but Gretchen loved it, and explained that it had been sent to her by her aunt in Germany.

"It has a lofely poem on its back," said Gretchen; "it vas come

out of a magazine, und my aunt she paste it on the picture ven she cut it out for us."

"Do you know it, Gretchen?" asked Gracie. "I would like so much to hear it."

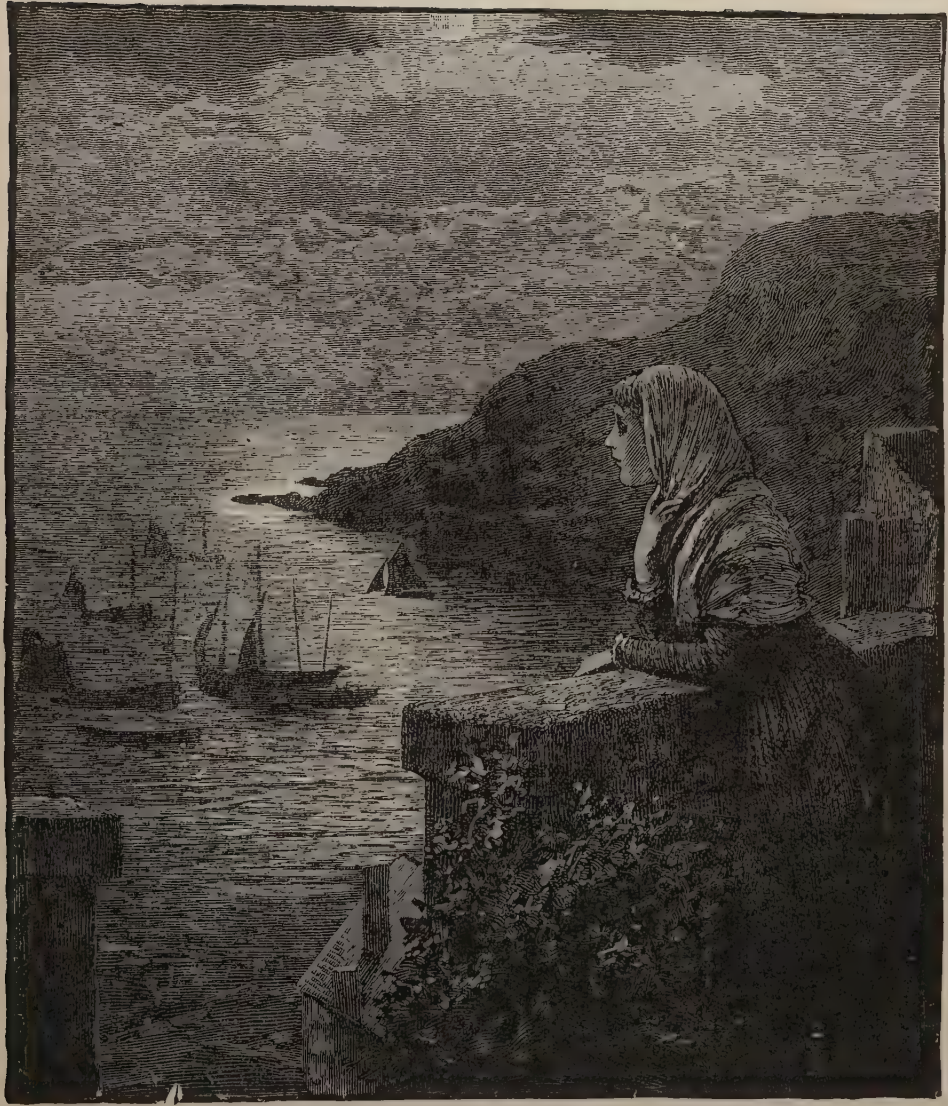
"Oh, we haven't time now," interrupted Mamie, who didn't care for poems very much, and was restless to be out-doors again.

"Yes, we have," said Rhoda; "it'll only take ten minutes to get home, and if Gracie likes to hear the poem, we'll wait for her."

"All right," said Gretchen, with a little roll on the "r," in her foreign way. "I vas going to say it quickly as I can."

So she began :

Ofer the vaters calm and bright,
Und rippling under the soft moonlight—
Ofer the vaters far away
Mine fader sail for many a day!
He lay his hand so kind on mine head,
Und, ach! so sweet vas those words he said.
"Mine leetle mädchen must vatch for me
Till I come home from ofer ther sea.
Und mine leetle mädchen she vas not sad
Ven her fader vant her try und be glad."
So I vatch for him while the day is bright,
Und I think of him in the qviet night
Und I pray the lieber Gott above
To keep him safe in His tender love,
Till back from ofer the vide, vide sea
Mine fader he come sailing to me.



THE PICTURE FROM GERMANY.

"That is nice," said Gracie softly, pitying the maiden who was watching over the sea for the dear father who perhaps—just perhaps—might not return. "Thank you, Gretchie, for saying it to me."

Gretchen colored with pleasure, more for the sound of the little pet name (which had never been given her before) than because of Gracie's thanks.

"That was a pretty name, it sounds good to me," she said shyly, laying her hand on Gracie's arm.

"You are dear Gretchie," repeated Gracie warmly, "and I'm glad you're coming to our picnic."

Then the little visitors said good-by, and went out again upon the road.

The sky had lost its beautiful crimson by this time, and had turned to a purple which was fast deepening into gray.

Robbie looked up with a comical gesture of despair, clasped his hands, and exclaimed :

"Ofer the sky, the western sky,
I see no crimson with mine eye.
Oh, vhere has mine beautiful sunset flown !
Und vhy has—"

"Robin Moore, you're a bad boy," interrupted Gracie, a little touch of anger in her tone. "I think it's the meanest thing to make fun of Gretchen, just when we've been in her house, and



"A FEW MOMENTS OF PLAY."

she's been so kind." Robbie looked repentant. "Wasn't really making fun of her," he explained. "But I don't see why she can't just as well say 'over' as 'ofer,' and 'where' as well as 'vhere,'—do you, Jackabus?"

Jack's cap went up in the air, as he thought over a fitting answer. You see, he wanted to side with Robbie, and yet he didn't dare risk a glance of reproach from Gracie's blue eyes, so it was really a question requiring careful thought.

"Why don't you speak up, Jack," said Rob. "You know you 'gree with me that Gretchen's a nice girl, but she does make awful work of our language."

Jack replaced his cap on his head, pulled a daisy, and began to chew the stalk, casting a side-glance to see if the girls were listening; then he said boldly:

"Well, it's this way: Gracie's right, and you're right, and Gretchen's right; and if it ain't any of her business how we talk, it ain't any of ours how she talks, so long as we like each other."

"That's so, Jack," cried the girls together, and Robbie laughingly added, "Yah, yah, dot vas so!" with such a merry twinkle in his eyes that even Gracie had to give in and laugh, and her roguish brother, taking advantage of it, looked at her steadily, and exclaimed with an assumption of rapture, "Ah! now I see the sunset mit mine eye in thy face, mine leetle sister!"

"Maybe, Mister Robin, if you try to speak German," said Mamie, throwing grass at him, "Gretchie might take her turn at laughing. Come, hurry up, children, I'm awfully hungry."

And while they were hastening home, the subject of their merry discussion, little Gretchen, was trotting good-naturedly up and down the road near her little house, with the baby brother on her back, for a few moments of play, before she must go in and get tea for the good mother. She was such a happy little Gretchen, with the anticipation of the picnic filling her mind, and the memory of her little visitors and their kindness still overflowing her heart.



CHAPTER X.

THE START FOR THE LAKE.



THURSDAY dawned brightly, and gave promise of a beautiful day for the picnic.

Rhoda declared the sunbeams had never been so bright and merry before, and Jack said, "they couldn't have chosen a more jolly day for a picnic if they'd had one made to order."

"You won't have to start from here before ten o'clock, my boy," said his father at the breakfast table, "and I have an errand for you to do between now and then."

"All right, sir, but—oh, papa, it isn't to weed the verbena bed, is it? I forgot to do it yesterday, but—"

"Guilo did it for you, my son, though I should think you could take care of that special little flower-plot mamma thinks so much



WAITING FOR THE PICNIC WAGON.

of. But I want you to take a message to Griggs for me, and you can start as soon as you like. It will only take you fifteen or twenty minutes."

"I'm all ready now, sir," replied Jack, "if I may be excused from table. Come along, Rob, you've eaten no end already. Haven't you finished yet?"

So Robbie was also excused, and away the two boys went with the message to Griggs.

They passed the school-house, and in the yard adjoining were gathered a host of children of all sizes and ages.

"Hello, Jerry, Sam, all of you! what you doing here when there ain't any school?" shouted Jack.

"Oh, only waitin' for the wagon to come 'long. Teacher, she's coming in a minute, an' the big wagon's goin' to take us all from here. You two fellers comin' with us?"

"No, Sam, we're going in our own party, but we'll meet you there all the same. We don't start till ten. Look out for us!"

So whistling and running, shouting and laughing, Jack and Robin hurried on, and soon reached Griggs with their errand.

"I'm just goin' 'long up your way now," said the man, "with a load o' lumber; you fellers want ter ride back! Catch a holt, now, an' don't spile yorselves with a fall off the boards."

Some minutes were thus saved the boys on their homeward trip, and they reached the farm in time for a good rest, and a cool-



"DO LET HER COME."

ing "wash up" before the wagonette and the dog-cart were ready for the start to the lake.

Mrs. Moore got into the wagonette, and Gracie and Mamie followed her. That is Mamie who sits nearest the little stout horse who brays instead of neighing, when hungry or excited, and is called a donkey, you know. Gracie is sitting next her mother on the other side of the wagonette, and Master Robbie is opposite her.

Rhoda was put into the dog-cart with Mrs. Wakely and Jack, and Guilo (who was not cheated out of the fun because of being a "stranger within the gates"), but Gracie urged Mr. Wakely to let her come in with them, although he thought it would be too crowded.

"Oh, do let her come, Mr. Wakely," coaxed the little girl, and Robbie, coming to his sister's aid, added as a convincing argument, "Don't see how Gretchen's going to squeeze into the dog-cart, 'less Rhoda leaves room for her, and Rhoda 'll be nice to ride with snug like this. If Mamie 'll let her sit next me, I'll squeeze her on the sly, now and then, and she'll know we love her."

"You needn't squeeze her for us, Rob Moore," exclaimed Mamie, "we can do our own loving, and—and Rhoda don't like boys to hug her; you know she told you that yesterday out in the swing."

Robbie blushed; Mr. Wakely smiled, Mrs. Moore looked amused,

and Gracie said in low tones to her sister, "Mean of you, to tell tales of your brother, Mame"; then to Robbie, "You may hug me all you like, dearie. I like to be hugged by boys. I mean—I mean by brothers."

"Rhoda's brother?" questioned Robbie, himself again on the instant.

Gracie blushed this time. "No, Mamie's brother," she said with a laugh in her eyes, and just then, in response to a signal from her father, Rhoda hopped out of the dog-cart and climbed gleefully beside Gracie in the wagonette, and the word was given, "Go!"

On the way through the lane they were to pick up Gretchen, you remember, and there she was, sure enough, waiting for the party, her pretty fair face all aglow with pleasure. Gretchen couldn't remember when she had had so delightful a prospect of pleasure before her for a long, long time, and her blue eyes were sparkling like stars.

"Don't you vas be naughty now, mine Gretchen," called the smiling-faced mother from the door, as Gretchen seated herself beside Mrs. Wakely.

"As if little Gretchie could ever be naughty," remarked Gracie to Rhoda, as the little German *mädchen* nodded merrily back to her mother, and answered, "Ach! nein, nein!" And when the picnickers had gone on some distance, Gretchen looked back and saw her mother still watching, and smiling after her.



CHAPTER XI.

BY THE LAKE.



Our party neared the lake they saw that the picnic fun had begun in good earnest. Children were scattered all over the place, under the trees, beside the shore, over the rocks, and all around in spots. The donkey and the mare Jess were unhitched from the wagonette and dog-cart, and tied under the trees, and the children were off like shot from a gun, while the two mothers sat down for a quiet talk and to watch with observant eyes the doings of their own little flock.

"Hello! Jack! Rob! come this way!" shouted a boy whom Jack saw seated on an old chest further up the shore.

"There's Sam Curtis yelling for us: let's go, Rob, shall we?"



"HELLO! JACK! ROB! COME THIS WAY!"

said Jack. "And that's old Tom's chest he's sitting on. I'll bet a stick of chewing-gum it's full of crawfish. He's always catching 'em and selling 'em up at the hotels in Waramaug. Come on!"

So they ran down over the rocks until they reached Sam and his companions, who were peeping through the holes in the chest at its creeping, crawling contents.

Flinging stones into the lake, and trying who could throw farthest, afforded amusement for some time. Then Robbie, seized with a mischievous impulse, widened a hole in the chest, and had the fun of seeing a fish crawl through it into freedom and sunlight again.

Another followed its companion's example, and Jack and Sam were advising Robbie to repair damages as quickly as possible, when a huge figure came striding along the shore, and before the boys could think what to do, a large hand had collared Jack, and a gruff voice demanded what right he had to meddle with "what didn't consarn him, no how?"

"'Twasn't Jack," cried Robbie, bravely confessing himself the offender. "'Twasn't Jack, so you just leave him alone!"

Tom glanced at the boy, whom he hadn't seen before, and whom he didn't know was "one of them boarders at Wakely's folks."

"What *you* puttin' in your oar fer, anyway? Who be ye, I wonder, an' if you meddled, what right had ye ter tech a stranger's property, anyway?"

Robbie flared up, and replied: "I'm Robert A. Moore, of New York city, and I'm boarding at Jack's house, and if you want to know any more, inquire of Mr. Ralph J. Moore, at present in



AMONG THE ROCKS.

London, England ; and if you don't feel like walking so far, why, there's my mother, and Jack's mother, too, up there under the trees, and I've got two sisters loafing around here somewhere, and—"

"Here, hold on, youngster—I don't know as I keer 'bout more'n a yard or so o' your gab. Better stop to breathe now, hadn't yer?" Then as Robbie wiped his heated little face, old Tom turned to Jack and asked, with a sort of contemptuous wave of his big paw in Robbie's direction :

"Say, Jack, is that un tellin' truth? he sorter looks braggy 'bout his chin."

"Jack, released from "durance vile," stretched himself, rearranged his collar, pulled his jacket into position, and stood beside Robin.

"Yes, he is telling truth, and his father 'll pay you off, if you're not careful, for being so rude to him. Say, Tom, let me introduce you to Rob's sisters, they're no end nice. Wait till I bring 'em."

Tom promised to wait, and going up to Robbie said good-humoredly, "Wal', youngster, ef so be 'at you are Jack's friend an' his marm's boarder, I'll be friends with you too, only I do feel kinder techy 'bout havin' my fish meddled with. Come down some day with Jack, an' I'll give ye a row if you'd like. I've a pretty good boat, you know."

Just then Jack returned with Gracie and Mamie and introduced them to Tom, and the children around, and pretty soon they all ran off to play amongst the rocks and wade a little here and there, while Tom carted his chest off to a safer locality.

So what with swinging, climbing trees, scrambling over rocks, wading, rolling in grass, playing games of hide and seek, leap-frog, and others in which the girls could join, the morning passed, and the picnickers were growing hungry.

Jack ran in search of his mother.

"I say, mamma darling! ain't we going to fill up pretty soon? Rob and I are 'most starved, we're so empty, clear down to our toes. Isn't it eating-time?"

"Call the others, Jack, and we'll eat our luncheon right here under the trees. The table will be pretty full with all the school children, and it's so nice and quiet here."

So Jack scampered off again, and meanwhile in various directions the preparations for luncheon were going on. About the table was gathered a comfortable number of little folks, and here and there nearer the shore, and back beneath the trees, other groups were spreading, and over the whole scene the beautiful summer sky and its wealth of sunbeams shone generously, and without a cloud to mar their beauty.

Under the trees higher up the sloping bank, our party was

sitting, enjoying the luncheon which Mrs. Wakely had taken from the well-filled baskets.

"Too bad papa couldn't come!" sighed Rhoda, "poor papa! having to stay home all alone while we're having such fun! Have a sandwich, Gretchie?"

"I was thanking you," replied German Gretchen, helping herself modestly to the smallest sandwich in the plate.

"Oh, I say, Gretchen Sterne, ain't you delicate in your appetite, though," cried Jack. "See me!" and he opened his rather capacious mouth, into which fully half of a sandwich disappeared. Robbie, not to be outdone, succeeded in cramming fully two-thirds of his piece of bread between his two rows of pearly teeth, and by that time both boys had drawn upon them the rebukes of their mothers.

"I wonder whether Frank would be as proud of his brother as he hoped to be, if he could see him now!" quietly remarked Mrs. Moore, and Mrs. Wakely added:

"I always felt that Jack's manners were at least as nearly gentlemanly as possible, but perhaps, being his mother, I've been too sanguine and trustful."

The boys were a beautiful shade of crimson now, and the four little girls pitied them. Gracie, to turn the conversation, said: "Let's guess what Frankie's doing now! Poor Frankie! I guess he misses us dreadfully!"



THE PICNIC BESIDE THE LAKE.

"I guess he doesn't!" replied Robbie. "He's having a splendid, jolly, no end boss time there with those other fellows. Isn't that so, mamma? Didn't he say so in his last letter?"

Mrs. Moore smiled. "Well, hardly as much fun as study, dear, it seemed to me. "But"—turning to Mrs. Wakely—"my son is very ambitious, and I would be glad if he did not study quite so closely. His father sent him to that school so that he would have a change of scene, and pure air while engaged with his books; but Frank isn't a very robust fellow, and I would like to have had him with me all summer long."

The luncheon was soon finished, and the boys departed for the shore, but the little girls preferred to linger under the trees, and little Gretchen, throwing herself backward, and clasping her plump arms high above her head, looked with worshipful eyes up into the blue expanse of sky where the fleecy clouds (if anything so white deserved the name of "cloud") were lazily floating.

"It was all so lovely as a dream!" she murmured, "and like the poetry mine mother was reading the other day one time."

"Oh, can you say it to us, Gretchie? It will be so nice to listen to it here under the trees. Do please try."

"Oh, yah! I try, but I was not sure I can all of them say,"



“AND HERE AND THERE ALONG THE SHORE.”

replied the little *mädchen* smilingly. She thought a minute, then began a little poem called

PEACE.

It vas like the calm of ā summer day
Ven the sky vas bright und fair,
Und the perfumed breath of a million flowers
Vas vafsted ofer the air.

It vas like the blue of the spreading sky,
So soft, so vide, so deep,
Where the leetle clouds of snow-white fleece
Together herd like sheep.

It vas like the breast of a quiet lake
Where ripples stir them not,
Und shadows lie them sound asleep,
Und tempests are forgot.

Yah, shust like these mine heart does rest
Under the spreading love,
Und care, und vatchfulness, und peace
Of the lieber Gott above.

Und—

“Oh, Gretchie, Gracie, look ! look over there ! See, isn't that Miss Annie Garland, the teacher ? ”

Mamie's voice interrupted the poem, which was speedily forgotten as the children watched a pretty scene just below the hill where they were sitting. The path upon which they looked ran

along the edge of the lake for some little distance, and was well shaded by trees on the other side.

Along this path capered three little boys, prancing as horses before their driver, who was indeed the young school teacher. Not only was she acting in the capacity of driver, but she had converted her shoulders into a kind of chariot for the benefit of one of the little ones of her flock, and all five of them were having a merry romp, as the shrill sounds of childish laughter came up the hill.

"Oh, let's go down and have some fun too," said Mamie. "Gretchen, I'll swing you if you like, and we'll take turns. Come along! I see an empty swing. If you don't hurry some of those girls 'll get it."

So they darted off, the four little happy friends, and were busy with play until at half-past four o'clock the bugle (which had been agreed upon as the signal for the picnic's close) sounded clearly, and brought all the stragglers together to prepare for the homeward journey after a merry and, as Jack expressed it, "a boss tip-topper."

"How did you like it, Guilo?" asked Mrs. Moore of the little fellow, who had been so excited all day that by this time his eyes were like stars and his dark skin flushed crimson.

"I, lady? Oh, I likes it vera, vera much. I no get tire of de fun at all. I tank you for lettin' Guilo go."

CHAPTER XII.

A CLOUDED SKY WHICH IS FINALLY CLEARED.



“A ND you never have a sigh in your heart now, mamma?”

“Not very many, at any rate, darling!” was the reply, “and you mustn’t worry about mamma so.” They were sitting all alone by themselves, having a cosy time, mamma and Rhoda, in a shady place behind the barn. Mrs. Wakely had been inclined to headache all day, and now, near the twilight hour, Rhoda,

whose watchful eyes had discovered the traces of weariness on the face she so dearly loved, had coaxed her mother out for a little rest, and “hiding-time” as she called it.

“I will take a book and read to you, mamma,” she said, by way of further inducement, and the tired woman yielded to her little girl’s wishes so coaxingly uttered. Little dog Trip, the stable



"PRANCING AS HORSES BEFORE THEIR DRIVER."

pet (a small and not very good-looking dog which Jem had found and adopted), followed them out and lay down for a comfortable nap contentedly beside them.

Rhoda had drawn the pins from her mother's hair and with loving, tender little fingers caressed



A COZY NOOK.

the aching head. Then she had read to mamma the most interesting of those wonderful stories she and Jack had enjoyed

so much, and finally they had drifted into a loving little confab, during which Rhoda had asked the question which begins this chapter.

"Well, you don't have such a hard time, after all, as you thought you would, do you, mamma, taking boarders; they are such nice people, and you can't help loving them,—can you?"

"We have been most fortunate truly, dearie. But come, I've been idle long enough, and Chloe will be coming to look for me. It must be nearly tea-time now."

So they went back, and just before reaching the house they met Gracie, whose face wore a troubled look.

"Isn't Mamie with you?" she asked. "I can't find her anywhere, and I've looked and looked!"

"Why, I thought you and Mamie were never apart," replied Mrs. Wakely smiling. "What's the trouble? Have you had a quarrel at last?"

Expecting a laughing negative—Mrs. Wakely was surprised to see the shadow deepen on the little face upturned before her, as Gracie replied gravely:

"Oh no, we haven't quarreled, but—but—you see Robbie and—and Mamie—they didn't quite—they couldn't see things exactly alike, and so—well—Robin, he said she was—he called her names, and was ungentlemanly to Mamie, and Mamie said cross things to

him, and—and they kind of got mad with each other. Oh, I'm ashamed to tell it, but I wish they hadn't been so naughty. I can't find where Mamie is, and I'm so worried. I want 'em to make up, and Robin says Mamie must begin."

"Oh, that's too bad!" said Mrs. Wakely, as she passed into the house, and then she forgot all about the matter.

But Rhoda, with distress in her heart, and written most plainly on her little face, lingered behind with Gracie, and together the little friends discussed the sad affair of the quarrel, and disappearance of Mamie.

As for Robin, he had marched off with Jack for his most sympathetic companion, and declared vehemently that as he was the injured one of the two disputants, it was only fair that Mamie should be the first to make up.

Jack agreed with him, and after deciding to "hold the fort" a little longer, at any rate, just to see if Mamie would finally give in—they returned to the house with a dignified air and determined expression of countenance, which boded ill for the renewal of peace for which Gracie so earnestly longed.

"You ought to be ashamed, Robin," said Rhoda; "here's Mamie been and got lost somewhere, and we're so scared about her, and—and it's all your fault, too."

Jack laughed, and Robbie replied: "Oh, she'll turn up all right. She's the boss girl for taking care of herself, never fear."

While they were talking Jack disappeared, and ere long Mr. Wakely, coming from the field, saw a large placard tacked upon the barn, and reading thus :

“STARTLING DEVELOPMENTS.

A family fude. Sudden disappearance of a member of a distinguished New York family, owing to a quarrel. Such is life!”

“What does this mean?” inquired Mr. Wakely, a little later, sternly of Jem, who was grooming the horses.

“Dunno, sir,—’cept Jack, he’s bin up to tricks ; seen him a minit ago doin’ somethin’ with a paper an’ pen an’ ink.”

Mr. Wakely put his hand to his mouth and gave a peculiar whistle, which Jack had been taught to understand as a signal for him which he must always obey at once. When he presently appeared—

“Take that down, sir,” said his father, pointing to the placard, “and never be guilty of such a silly joke again. And moreover, Jack, when you are inclined to distinguish yourself by way of a public notice, study your spelling-book first. I’m quite ashamed of you.”

Jack blushed, and tore the placard from its position, explaining meanwhile that Mamie had disappeared, and that it was owing to a trouble between her and her brother, and he (Jack) thought it good fun to put up a notice about it.

“To trouble Mamie’s mother if she should see it?” inquired Mr. Wakely. “A quarrel is a bad thing, my boy, and instead of helping it on, or making light of it—even though it be only a small matter, after all—you should do your best to bring about peace. I think both Robbie and Mamie are too affectionate in their natures to continue this quarrel long, however, and if Mamie has gone off for a solitary walk, perhaps you and Robin would do well to go and meet her on her homeward way.”

“All right then,” said Jack, who had meanwhile torn the offending notice into strips, which were now lying in the ash-barrel. “I’ll play peace-maker, and make things calm as a summer day again.”

Meanwhile what had become of Mamie? With her little face red with angry feelings (and how unusual those feelings were!), she had tilted her dimpled chin high in air, and stalked majestically away from her brother. Rhoda was with her mother; Gracie was upstairs with mamma, and Mamie was consequently alone. She was ashamed to confide her trouble to anybody, and yet her little heart was overflowing with wrath. So she wandered out into the road, and after standing irresolutely at the gate for a few seconds, finally turned up the road and took a solitary ramble in search of peace. How long she walked she didn’t in the least realize; but growing tired at last, and feeling ashamed—after her

solitary ponderings—of her foolish quarrel with the brother she loved so dearly, she decided to go back, hunt him up, and tell him she was sorry.

“I’ll cut across this field,” she said to herself, remembering that once before, when they had all been walking, Jack had piloted them a “short cut” across a meadow, which, judging by appearances, must have been this very one. So she climbed the fence and hurried along as fast as she could until a gate at the further end admitted her into a road which she felt positive was the right one, because there were certain trees she remembered, and just back of them, around the curve, she would find a little brook. So she trudged gayly on, swinging her straw shade-hat in her hand, and feeling the breezes blow about her neck unhindered by the flowing tresses she had, for comfort’s sake only a little while back, tucked up with hairpins about the top of her pretty little head.

But the little brook did not appear, after all, and moreover the trees she had taken as guides began, when she came near them, to look unlike those she remembered. In fact, everything looked new and strange, and Mamie was puzzled to know just where she was.

Presently the sound of horses’ hoofs reached her ear, and the thud—thud—thud of the sound increased distinctly as she neared a bend in the road. Yes, there was a good-natured looking old

farmer-man coming that way on a stout jog-trotting horse. She would ask him the way home.

He came on, whistling merrily, and sitting at ease in his saddle.

Mamie waited at the side of the road until he was close by ; then,—

“ Please, can you tell me the way to Mrs. Wakely’s house ? ” she asked politely.

The farmer drew rein and asked, “ What did you say, my dear ? ”

Mamie repeated the question, and he said, with an honest tone of concern : “ Why, bless ye, my gal, you’re more’n a mile outer you’re way. How in creation did ye git offen your beat so, I wonder ? ”

Mamie didn’t know.

“ Wal, I’ll tell yer what I’ll do for ye, seein’s you’re a leetle creetur, an’ I reckon a stranger in these parts, seein’s you git lost so easy,—I’ll give ye a lift up here in front o’ me, if ye don’t feel afraid to try it, an’ I’ll jest go a leetle mite outer my way an’ set ye down whar ye kin jest foller your nose an’ git home in a jiffy.”

Mamie was willing and grateful, and the farmer, reaching one stout foot as far down as possible, bade her step upon it, giving him her hand at the same time—and presently she was



“ PLEASE, CAN YOU TELL ME THE WAY TO MRS. WAKELY’S HOUSE?”

snugly ensconced before him, and on the way out of her perplexities.

Thus it happened that Jack and Robin (the latter, like Mamie, this time heartily repentant) missed meeting the truant of whom they were in search, and were obliged at last to return with wondering hearts and somewhat anxious faces, to ask what they had better do to find the little lost lamb, for by this time it was growing late, and it was time all the pets were safe in the fold.





“AND FONDLING ONE OF GRETCHEN’S PETS.”

CHAPTER XIII.

“ALL’S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.”



AFTER Mamie and the farmer had jogged along some distance, they reached a fork in the road, and here the man drew rein to set the little girl upon her feet again.

“Now then, sissy, you trot along and go to the left, an’ then you’ll go right, you see. Ha! ha!” laughing at the seeming inconsistency of his sentence. “And when you start for a walk again look out for signs along the way. Good-by, an’ good luck to ye.”

“I’m very much obliged, sir,” said Mamie, not forgetting her manners.

“Ho! you’re welcome, sis,” and with a chirrup to his nag, the farmer went on down the other road, while Mamie hurried along according to directions.

Pretty soon she came in sight of some familiar scenery, and rec-

ognized in another moment the little strip of pasture behind Gretchen Sterne's house. The sheep were huddling together near the gate, and a little further down the figure of a young woman was seen bending over one of Gretchen's pets, and fondling it.

As Mamie drew near, the young woman lifted her eyes and exclaimed :

"Why, Mamie Moore, where have you been, dear? I passed your house a little while ago (I was on my way here to call upon Gretchen and her mother), and I met Robbie and Jack, also the two girls, looking for you with very distressed little faces. They said you had disappeared somewhere, and they couldn't tell where, and Robin seemed quite worried, poor little fellow, for fear you had been hurt. Where did you go?"

Mamie explained that she had started on a solitary ramble and lost in some way the right road home. Then she hastened on with a new grief tugging at her heart, that she not only had been cross with Robbie, but had made them all anxious and unhappy in the bargain.

How she longed to tell her brother how sorry she was, and how she quickened her steps until at last, tired and sad, and longing for a good cry in mamma's arms, she found herself safe at home, and in the midst of her little companions, who gathered about her, all talking at once.

"I say, Mame, I'm no end sorry," began Robbie, forgetting his dignified resolutions to wait until Mamie should make the first advances.

"You ain't the leastest bit sorrier than I am," she interrupted eagerly, "and oh, Robin, it is so horrid to dispute; it makes me so heavy down in my heart, and—and I feel so uncomfortable all over."

Thus followed a string of questions from the others, and a last—as Mamie started to go up to her mother's room, after giving a full description of her walk and horseback ride—Robin followed her and pleadingly asked:

"May I just kiss you again, Mame? I love you, and—and I'm so 'shamed of not being a gentleman to you."

Mamie turned and put her arms about his neck. "I'm more 'shamed than you, Robin Hood, 'cause I'm a year older than you, you know, and besides I'm a girl, and boys are meant to be ruder than girls, anyhow!" She kissed him and ran up to her mother.

A little later, after the supper was over, Gracie and Mamie had a little confab all alone together in the arbor, and Gracie told all about the anxiety which had possessed them during Mamie's absence; of the placard Jack had put up, and about which he had himself confessed to the children, because, as he said, "it seemed kind of mean to keep it secret, as though he hadn't been a mean feller." And Mamie, who was all washed and refreshed, and



A LITTLE CONFAB.

looked quite herself, with her hair falling back to its natural position again, listened and explained, and promised never to quarrel again.

"You're such a dear, good, little thing," she said, "no one could quarrel with you, Gracie."

"Oh, no! I'm not good, but it is so hard to think of cross things to say, and it doesn't seem worth the trouble. Oh, how dreadful to remember the unkind things we said!"

"Yes, I know," was Mamie's reply, thoughtfully spoken. "But sometimes Robin is provoking, and—and—so am I." She laughed, and together, arm and arm, the little sisters returned to the house, to find Rhoda, Jack and Robin just starting out to hunt them up.

"Your racket and tennis balls are out in the arbor, Robin, did you know it?" asked Mamie. "You said this morning you couldn't find 'em, you know."

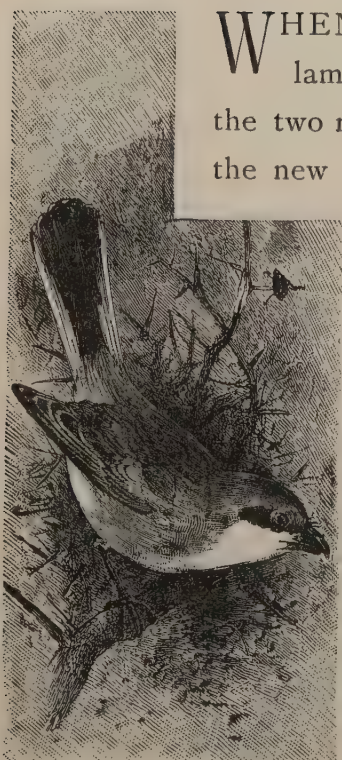
"Sure enough, I left them there," said Rob. "I say, let's have a good game to-morrow, shall we?"

The motion was carried, and the boys went off to ask Jem if he would find time early in the morning to re-whitewash the tennis court outlines for them.

"And when you come back," called Rhoda, "let's play at composition, as Jack and I used to do."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW GAME OF COMPOSITION.



WHEN the boys returned, the sitting-room lamps were lighted, and the little girls, with the two mammas, were waiting the beginning of the new "composition game."

That is, it was new to the Moore family, and Mrs. Moore afterwards gave it as her opinion that it was a most charming and novel way of passing an evening.

(Try it, some of you little readers, and see for yourselves.)

"Now here are some pictures," said Rhoda, producing a scrap-book containing pictures which had been cut from various magazines now and then, "and we must each of us lay one on the table before us, and compose a story to fit the picture; and we must do it right off smoothly, and

not be long, 'cause it keeps the others waiting, you see." Now, who'll begin first?"

"The idea!" laughed Mamie; "as if I could tell a decent story! why, I never tried!"

Gracie modestly declared herself unfit for the game, as "she wasn't the leastest clever."

Robbie blushed, and said he "s'posed he could if he knew how to try, but he—he didn't know how to try."

Rhoda and Jack laughed at them, and said "It was the easiest thing!" The two mammas urged them all to try, and promised to make an effort themselves, and then Jack asked if Guilo couldn't come in and play with them.

"It'll be such fun to get him to spin a yarn," said he. "Do let him come."

So Guilo was called, and shyly came in amongst the other children, his large black eyes gleaming with excitement and pleasure.

The game was explained to him, and Jack asked, "Can you do it, Guilo? Just make up a story for a picture; well"—looking over the collection—"for this one, maybe. Try it now, chappie; let's hear how smart you can be."

Guilo's mouth widened. "Oh yes, I no 'fraid to try. I yarn to the other boys in the city, an' I yarn to the old woman who no beat me any more, an' now I yarn to you."

His picture was a simple enough one. Here it is, you can see



THE SUBJECT OF GUILLO'S STORY.

for yourselves, and I must say there was nothing very inspiring about it.

But Guilo put it on the table before him, and after a moment of thought, during which his brow was drawn into a thousand knots, he began :

“ Once on a time there was a girl. She was a good girl an’ she live in Itale-e. She came one day to New-er York ’gainst her own will ’cause her moder hire her to a man who was in Itale-e for bringing childrens to New-er York. He give her to old cross woman an’ she make her beg for to eat, and make her steal an’ be bad if she could. An’ the girl find a book one day and got reading easy words ’stid of beggin,’ an’ the old woman she mad, and punish the girl by make her have a beatin,’ an’—an’—an’ ”—here Guilo paused to consider what should come next, and being suddenly seized with an idea, relaxed his brows and continued—“ an’ the little girl she runned away an’ a kind lady find her,”—he sent an expressive glance in Mrs. Wakely’s direction, as though to let her know that he had not forgotten how good a thing it was to be found by a “kind lady”—and then went on “ The kind lady she send the poor little girl to school and have her learn lessons, an’ she grow up a good girl, an’ she get married an’ live on a farm, an’ when she—when she some day maybe, p’raps find a little boy like me, she remember to be kind an’ good to him like Mis’ Wakely you know, an’—oh, I don’t ’member any more ’bout her, I guess.”

Every one clapped hands, and applauded Guilo’s masterful



ROBIN'S STORY, NO. I.

attempt, and then it was Robin's turn. He selected two pictures which seemed to be connected with each other, and clearing his throat, began very grandly, though with a pair of crimson cheeks :

"Well, there was a beautiful garden, and lots of trees and things, you know ; and there were three children, too. One was a girl, and the others were boys. The big one was her cousin and the other her brother. She loved them very much and was always with them. Well, well, one—one day, they all went out to play in the garden, and Dick said he'd roll the path and make it smooth, and while he was doing it a little bird fluttered from the branch of a tree, and not being very strong, 'cause it was just learning to fly, you know, it fell right square down in front of the big roller, and"—Robin paused, and looked solemnly around at his attentive listeners.

"Oh, Robbie, Robbie, are you going to say that the roller went over the poor, poor little bird ? Oh, how can you be so cruel ?"

This from Gracie, whose eyes were staring in an agony of fear, as she interrupted the story.

Robbie looked at her, then proceeded calmly : "and just before the roller went over the bird, it—*didn't*, 'cause the girl (her name was—let me see, I guess her name was Jenny) she ran and picked it up, and when the boys asked what kind of a bird it was, she said it was a wren. But Dick said it wasn't, it was a sparrow, and

then Hal said 'tain't either, it's a chippie,' and Dick said, 'I'll bet you a ride on that wheelbarrow, Jenny, that it's a sparrow, and Hal, he grew mad, and said, 'And I'll bet you a ride on the wheelbarrow that it's a chippie,' and Jennie said, 'Now the one that hasn't guessed right must be fair and pay his debt.' So the boys they promised sure pop to do it. Well, they all went off and found the gardener, and he took the bird in his hand and said right off: 'Why, lor me! that ain't neither a chippie nor a sparrer, it's a wren'; and then the girl looked awfully pleased, and the boys looked cheap.

But they had to pay off the bet, and so they did. They filled the wheelbarrow with leaves and things, and Jennie got in like a queen, and they rode her around, and not only her but her little baby brother who wanted to get in, and Dick he was horse, and Hal was driver, and—and—well, I guess I've told a pretty good story. But oh my! didn't I feel afraid to try it though!"

So Robbie's story was finished, and Jack came next.

He began very confidently, as though no shadow of doubt or perplexity was troubling him:

"Well, now, let me see. Oh, I know! Once there was an uncle. He was quite an old uncle, and he lived in a house all by himself, 'cause you see he wasn't—he was a bach'lor, and his housekeeper took care of him. Well, he—he had two nephews, and one day he sent for them to come and visit him, and he

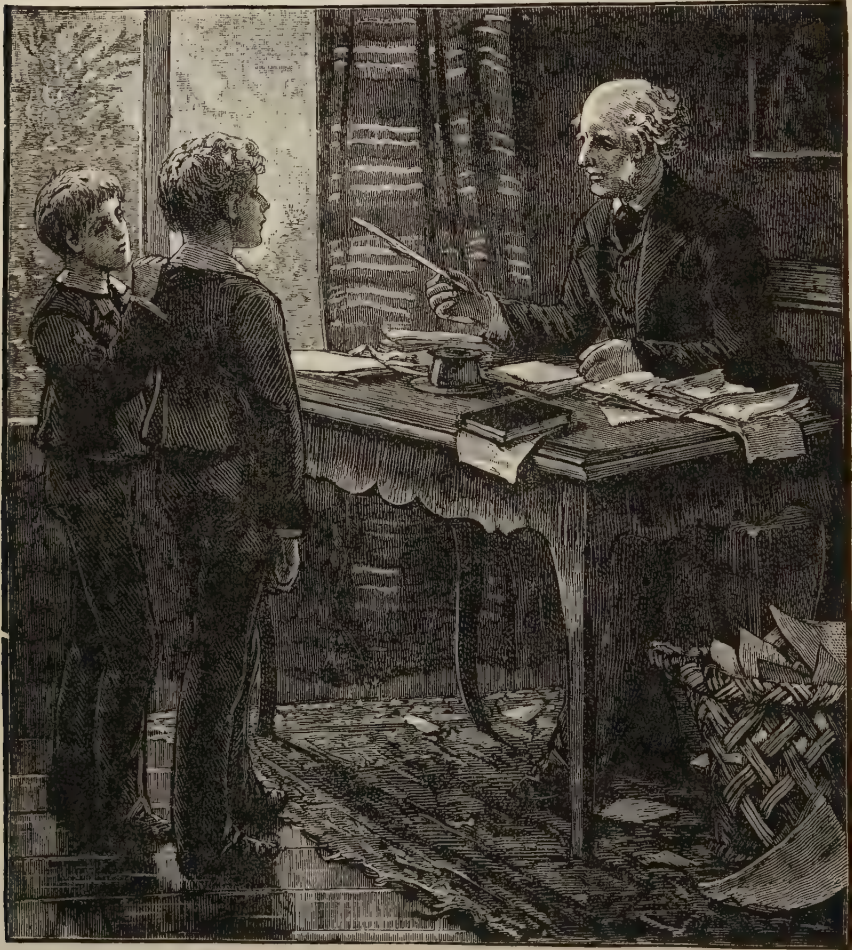
told them they might play all around everywhere but in his lib'ry, 'cause he did writing there, and he was afraid they'd meddle.

"They promised him they would mind all he said, but one day, when the lib'ry door was open, and the uncle wasn't in it,—(wasn't in the room, I mean; it sounded as though I meant he wasn't in the door, didn't it?) The two boys—one's name was Jo, and the other was Jim—peeked in and liked the looks of things in there, and kind of forgot about what the old uncle had told 'em, and so they staid in, and looked at the books, and fussed around, until at last they heard his latch-key in the hall door, and Jim said, 'Hello, if there ain't uncle!' and they cut and run, you better believe. And while they ran, Jo's foot caught in a basket, and over it went, and threw all the papers on the floor, in the dreadfulest litter you ever saw. When the uncle came in he saw it the first thing, and he called the housekeeper, and said very crossly: 'When you dusted in here this morning you left the door open, and the cat got in, and see what she did: all my papers thrown about. Now pick them up, and don't be so careless again!' Then the housekeeper she said. 'Oh, sir, I don't believe it was the cat; I think it was the boys. I'm sure the cat has been out-doors all the morning. But the uncle said 'No, my boys are too good and too obedient to enter this room when they've been forbidden, and nothing could make me believe they did it. No, it



ROBIN'S STORY, NO. 2.

was the cat, or the puppy. Never mind, only don't leave the door



JACK'S STORY.

open again.' Now the boys were listening all this time, and oh, you wouldn't believe how mean they felt!

“ Says Jem : ‘ I feel so mean and wicked ; let’s go and own up like men.’

“ ‘ No,’ said Jo ; ‘ so long as he thinks the cat or pup did it, what need to let him know how disobedient we fellows were ? Let’s keep dark about it.’

“ But Jim couldn’t be so dishonorable, so he talked it over with Jo, and finally they went in and stood up together, as decent boys would always do, and they told the uncle all about it. Jim blamed himself, ‘ cause he was the feller that proposed going in ; but Jo, he said he was most to blame, ‘ cause he should have refused, and then Jim would not have insisted. So the uncle, he talked to them, and told them it was better always not to run away from a fault committed, but to own it up and be sorry for it at once, and then run away from a repetition of it, you see. So it all ended nicely, and—well, that’s all. It’s your turn, Rhode.”

In the next chapter we will find how Rhoda, Mamie, and Gracie, and even the two mammas, succeeded as story-tellers.

CHAPTER XV.

THE COMPOSITION GAME CONTINUED.



RHODA' blushed, and looked anxiously at her picture.

"I don't believe I can do much," she said, "but, I'll try, at any rate, and you mustn't any of you laugh.

"Well, Steenie and Lucy and Annie were cousins, and they were boarding in the country. Steenie was a kind of a fighting boy, and it was awfully hard work to play with him, 'cept you let him have his own way all the time. He had a dreadful temper, and said things that made him madder than he was when he began, and made everybody else mad, too.

Well—so—well, one day they went out on the lawn to play tennis, and for a little while they had real fun together, 'cause, you see, Steenie was getting the best of the game, and—and of course he was good-natured. But by and by, he somehow got on the



RHODA'S STORY.

wrong side the game, and the girls saw the scowls growing blacker and blacker on his face, and they began to look out for storms.

“Annie was a kind of peace girl, but Lucy was for giving as good as you get always, and it used to make a kind of bother all around when there was a quarrel.

“Well, he got worse and worse, and what do you think! at last he just flung his racket down on the ground, and flew into a passion with Lucy.

“‘You’re a fraud-girl!’ he said, ‘and I wouldn’t play with you for a million games!’

“‘Oh, what a dreadful story!’ said Lucy, and her cheeks got so red, and her eyes so frowny.

“Annie felt so frightened she didn’t know what to say, but she said, ‘Oh, Steenie, don’t say rude things to a girl; Lucy didn’t know she was going to beat you.’ ‘You hush!’ he answered; ‘I ain’t talking to you, and you needn’t meddle; she is a fraud, and I won’t play with such a mean cheat, so now.’ Then Lucy said, ‘You’re nothing but a great rude boy, and I won’t play with a fellow who can’t keep his temper when he’s talking to a girl. If I were a boy to match you, I’d pitch into you well; so there now, Steenie Brown!’ At that, Steenie gave a sort of howl, and lifted his hand. Annie flew close up to him and tried to stop him, but he pushed out so hard that his hand struck the side of her head

and she fell with a hard bump on the ground. Then Steenie grew sober, and he and Lucy tried to pick her up ; but she had twisted her ankle and cried out in pain as they touched her, and then, before she could even tell them what was the matter, she tumbled down, and—and, let me see ; oh, she fainted away dead as a door-nail, and—”

“ Oh, pshaw, Rhode, what a thing to say, I guess if you put your hand on that old barn-door nail of ours, as I did yesterday, you'd think it wasn't very dead. It was alive enough to scratch, see !” and Jack, thus interrupting the story in what Rhoda considered its most thrilling part—showed a long, red scratch on his hand.

“ Don't interrupt me, Jack,” said Rhoda with dignity, and for once ignoring harm to her much-loved brother. “ You confuse me, and I can't tell how to make my story end.”

Jack begged pardon with great humility, and the narrative was continued.

“ Well, I tell you Steenie and Lucy were scared, and they called their mother, and after Annie had been put to bed, and the doctor had been sent for, the two naughty children told all the story to their mother, and Steenie was brave enough to confess that he was most to blame. Well, Annie nearly had brain fever, but she didn't after all, and—and Steenie, he was so ashamed to think that he might have been the cause of her death, that he

promised never to lift his hand to strike, or to use a cross, hasty word until he had counted ten first; and you see it took so long to count, and he had to do it so often, that he cured himself of being quarrelsome and was a good boy in future, and"—"so they lived in peace, and died in a pound of candle-grease," quoted Jack saucily, adding, "That's a boss story, Rhode; maybe you want Rob and me to look for its moral. Now then, Mamie, it's your turn."

Mamie exhibited her picture.

"I don't think it's a bit pretty one," she said complainingly, "but Rhode says it's the rule not to change the picture you first drew, so I s'pose I've got to make it work somehow."

She looked again at the picture and began:

"Johnny was a real rude, horrid boy! He loved to steal birds' nests, and catch butterflies, and—and he one day caught a frog in a net and made it hop about all tangled in the meshes—and—"

"Now that ain't fair! is it, mamma?" interrupted Robbie, giving his sister first a glance of protest, then appealing to superior wisdom. "It ain't fair, 'cause I didn't catch him only for a minute; so now."

Every one laughed at Robbie, who had put on the fitting "shoe" so readily.

"If you'd kept still, who'd have known I was hitting you?"



MAMIE'S STORY.

said Mamie, a little triumphantly, and winking one merry eye at the laughing mother. "Well, hush now, and let me go on. And he was always doing naughty things,—Johnny, I mean—I ain't hitting you now, Rob—and every one said he'd get paid back. Well, one day he ran away from his lessons, when his mother told him to study, and he went off to the woods, and tried to stone little birds off the trees. But fin'ly he saw a hornet's nest, and he stoned that instead of the birds, and presently out came a big fellow and walked on his wings to Johnny, and bit him on the head, and then it beckoned (this way) to its brother, and the brother came out and bit the bad boy on his ankle, and then they flew away, and he howled and cried and lay on the grass, burning and stinging in a way that served him right. Well, it happened that while he was crying like a big baby, a lady and a little girl came along, and the little girl said, 'Why, that's the very boy who stoned my little kitty the other day when he was going by our house, and I told him he'd get paid off some day, and he has, and I'm glad of it.'

"The lady asked Johnny what had hurt him, and he said he had been stung, and his ankle hurt so he couldn't walk home.

"The lady talked to him about being cruel, and told him she had heard what a cruel boy he was, and she said if he wasn't careful there would come a day when he'd have a big, dreadful sting inside him that would ache and hurt all the time; only,

instead of it's being a hornet that would bite him it would be his conscience, and it would keep on biting and hurting until he felt almost sick for ever having been cruel and unkind to dumb things. Johnny was frightened, and asked if a conscience-bite was poisonous and would kill him. And the lady said it would kill all his peace, and—"

"There, hold on, Mamie Moore, we don't want any 'Moore' of that kind of preaching story. You ain't big enough to be wrestling with a moral as large as that, anyhow, and—"

"Very well, Mr. Robin, you have made me forget how my story was going to end, so I'll just stop, and—now it's your turn, Gracie."

No persuasions could induce Mamie to go on; though, truth to tell, it wasn't so much the offended dignity as the lack of knowledge on her own part as to just how the story could be ended gracefully—which caused the interruption.

So the younger members of the game reluctantly laid her picture aside, and Gracie's was laid upon the table.

It was a very little picture and one that could not tax the brain very seriously, but Gracie was so timid and shy a little maiden, that she was now blushing to the tips of her small pink ears.

"Don't all of you listen!" she requested imploringly. "Don't all of you keep quiet, please. I'm sure I can tell it better if some one is talking all the time."

"Why, that would hardly be polite," said mamma, "besides, we want to hear it, you know, and whoever talks, of course, can't hear or allow any one else to. No, no! go on, dearie, just as the others did."

So Gracie, after a few embarrassed little coughs began:

"Once there was a dear little girl called Bessie, and she lived in a little bit of a house with her mother, and her father was sick, and—and they were poor people, and—"

"Five 'ands' already," whispered Robin to Jack. "Wonder if she's going to sell 'em by the pound!"

"'Sh, Robbie," said his mother warningly, for she knew how the shy Gracie would feel if the playful remark were overheard.

"They had a cow, and oh, how they loved it! Well, one day the mother went to call her cow and shut it up in the barn for the night, but it was nowhere around the house, nor in the fields—and though she called, and called, it didn't even moo for answer.

"So the poor woman came back, and cried a little, because, you see, she thought the cow was lost, and they would have no milk for the poor sick father or for little Bessie. But crying didn't do any good, and the father said, 'Come mother, 'tain't any use crying for spilt milk,' and the mother tried to be cheerful and so she said, 'Oh, I'm crying for lost milk, now, you know; that's



GRACIE'S STORY.

worse than spilled milk.' But it was pretty sad for them to lose the cow, and the mother said she would go out next morning and hunt it up.

"Well, the next morning she had to be busy with the sick father, and while she was hurrying with him, so as to get through and go to find the cow, little Bessie wandered out into the fields and kept thinking to herself, 'I'll find our moolly cow. I'll find her, and papa shall have some milk.'

"But she was only a little, little girl! only six years old, you know, and how could she find the cow? Well, she ran about the fields, but there was no cow, and fin'ly she ventured a little further off, and followed a brook around a hill, and all of a sudden she saw her moolly cow (with another cow that was strange to Bessie) standing on the opposite side of the river, She called out "Oh, moolly! my moolly cow!" and the cow heard her, and knew her voice, and looked at her, and then,—what do you think? it waded through the brook and came over to Bessie. And she patted its head and loved it, and then she took off her sun-bonnet, tied one long string to the cow's leg and held the other, and then back went Bessie leading the cow (she followed so nicely, though the string round her leg kind of puzzled her), until she finally reached her mother's field, and the mother had just reached the fence, more frightened about Bessie's being lost even than about the cow. But she was so glad to have them both again, and so

now that's all I know about this picture. I don't think it's a bit good ; but I tried to do it as well as I could."

"Bravo, Gracie!" cried Mrs. Wakely, and all the listeners applauded, too, till Gracie was quite red with blushes.

And now there were two pictures left. Mrs. Moore and Mrs. Wakely had promised to contribute their share in the fun, and the children insisted that there should be no "back out," as Jack expressed it.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE TWO MAMMAS TRY THEIR SKILL.



“OH, dear, must I make a goosie of myself?” laughingly asked Mrs. Moore, looking ruefully at her picture. Then she brightened up suddenly and said, “Why, I’ll tell you

what I’ll do, ladies and gentlemen, if you please: I’ll simply repeat a little poem I heard once, which will fit pretty well with this picture. Let me see, it goes something like this, I believe:

The night was still; the skies were bright
With stars that twinkled merrily,
When little Carl his mother kissed,
And started forth so cheerily



MRS. MOORE'S STORY.

To do an errand up the road,
Where loomed the big and shadowy mill.
"Come quickly back," his mother said,
And Carl replied, "Aye! that I will."
He hastened on beneath the light
That gleamed so soft from far above,
And whistled for the happiness
Within his heart, where peace and love
Were nestling side by side, and where
No thought of fear had dared to grow,
For the dear Lord was always near,—
How oft had "mother" told him so!

His errand done, he turned again
Towards "home" and "mother," for he knew
That should he linger on the way
'Twould worry her dear heart so true.
He stepped upon the narrow bridge
That crossed the stream beside the mill,
Alas! there followed a mis-step,
And then there sprang a cry so shrill
Upon the silent air of night,
That the old miller's wife arose—
And—"quick!" she cried, "quick, Betsey, see
If where the current swiftly flows
There be not some one struggling now!"
With staring eyes and pallid brow
Her daughter to the platform sprang,
And held her lantern high aloft.
Its yellow rays commingling with
The radiance of the starlight soft.

And yet again the cry rang out
Upon the silence: "Help! I'm here
Below the wheel! Oh, help!" The girl
Gazed downward, wide-eyed in her fear.
"Cling fast, my lad! cling fast!" she said,
"I'll drop a rope, have courage still!"
And Carl's young heart took hope anew,
And bravely then he called, "I will."

The rope was lowered. Ah! how soon
He clutched it with his puny strength,
And pulled himself all slowly up
The massive wheel, until at length
He stood all dripping, pale, and weak,
Upon the platform safe from harm,
And gazed upon the tide below,
While clinging to his rescuer's arm.

Meanwhile his mother waited long
Her boy's return. "What keeps him so?"
She asked herself, all anxiously;
"Some danger threatens Carl, I know."
Ah me! if she had seen him then,
Clinging, amidst the waters deep,
For very life, to that great wheel,
Well might she wring her hands and weep.
But as the time crawled slowly by,
And Carl yet lingered, fear grew wild,
And down upon her knees, she prayed
That God would guide her little child

Secure from danger, if so be
That danger threatened him that night,
And calm and trustful then was she.

'Twas twelve o'clock ere little Carl
Came to his mother's door at last,
And told his story tremblingly
While her fond arms enclosed him fast.
"Ah, 'twas the prayer I prayed for thee,
My son," she cried, with grateful heart.
"But for my prayer the waters deep
Had held my boy and me apart!"

And now that Carl has grown a man,
And fights life's battles day by day,
He still remembers "mother's" faith,
And prays all dangers far away.

"There! that's the rhyme. It goes very nicely with the picture," said Mrs. Moore; "and now let us see how Mrs. Wakely will get out of the scrape."

The other mamma laughed, and held her picture up to view, with a twinkle in her eyes. "Oh, I'll get along somehow," she said. "I guess it won't take me very long or be very hard work to dispose of this picture." So she began:

"Well, once on a time there were three little girls, and a big sister, and two little girls and a big brother, and they lived near each other, and the children played together every day. But one



MRS. WAKELY'S PICTURE.

afternoon there was a terrible time amongst them. The three little girls quarreled with the two little girls, and said unkind things to them, and then ran home and told their big sister all about it.

“‘Now you come directly with me,’ said the sister, taking their hands and leading them to the other house. ‘I will make you ashamed of yourselves.’

“So they all went to the house where the two little girls lived, and—well, I can’t tell you any more about them, because they all melted away and disappeared, and there was an end of them, so you see I can’t—even if I wanted to—finish the story.” Mrs. Wakely calmly laid her picture down then, and took up her knitting again.

“Oh, mamma!” “Oh, Mrs. Wakely!” came from the children in a chorus of dismayed voices. “I think you’re a real shirk, mamma!” from Jack.

“Just when we were crazy to know what they were going to do about that awful quarrel, too,” said Rhoda.

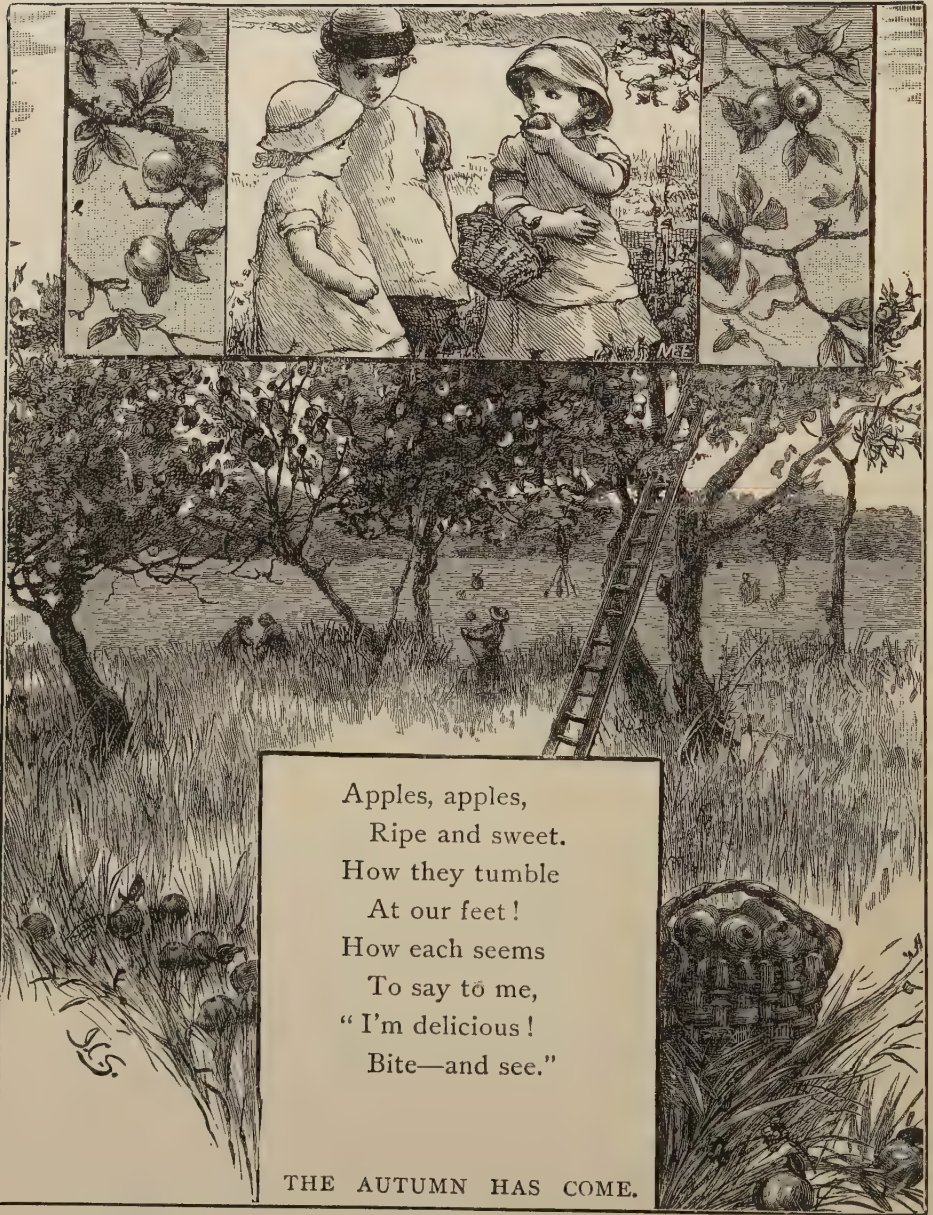
“And I wanted to know whether they got licked by the sister or the big brother,” said Robbie in an injured tone.

“And—and—I was hoping you were going to say that they said they were sorry,” said Gracie.

“Pooh! I wasn’t. I was hoping they’d get Hail Columbia from the big sister,” said Mamie, “and it would serve ’em right.”

However, Mrs. Wakely, having so successfully relieved herself of further responsibility concerning the picture, was not to be coaxed into taking it up again, and as it was now bed-time for the children, the game of composition was at an end. But all agreed that the next time it was played a first prize and a "Booby" prize should be given, and so make it more interesting.





Apples, apples,
Ripe and sweet.
How they tumble
At our feet !
How each seems
To say to me,
" I'm delicious !
Bite—and see."

THE AUTUMN HAS COME.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE AUTUMN HAS COME.



PASSING over some glad and busy weeks, which fled all too soon away from the sweet time of summer, we must now take up the events of the autumn, and we find the Wakely Homestead yet filled with its corps of merry children, under the guidance and care of the two loving mothers, who have grown to be warm friends, sincerely dreading separation, even as their young people began to bewail it.

"To think that papa will be home in a month, and we must leave here and go back to the city," mournfully exclaimed Mamie one morning.

"Oh, don't speak of it, please," said Rhoda sadly. "I can't bear to think of your going; it gives me the blues."

"Say, girls," cried Jack, bursting into the room just then, and scattering the "dolefuls" with his sunny face, "who'll ride on horseback this morning? Mame, you've learned to ride pretty well, you can take White Bess, and Rob can have my pony, and Rhoda, you take 'old Gray.' Gracie, I know you won't dare go at all, 'cause you're such a 'fraid-cat. You ain't been on a horse's back one single time this summer!"

Gracie looked rather ashamed, but to tell the truth she was still too timid to trust herself even on the gentlest horse Mr. Wakely owned. Mamie had learned very nicely how to ride, and her mother had made a pretty little habit for her, like Rhoda's, and the little girl much enjoyed riding about the fields, and on the road near the house. She was quite fearless, and Jack—her teacher—was very proud of his pupil.

So it was settled—with mamma's permission—that she and Rob should accompany Rhoda and Jack for a longer ride than before, on this exhilarating morning when the breath of October was quickening every pulse, and dressing the foliage throughout the country with gorgeous new colors.

"Now do be careful, children," called Mrs. Moore from the piazza, as the quartette of equestrians rode off side by side.

"All right! we'll be back for dinner, hungry as bears," was the

reply from Jack, and then down the road they went at a brisk trot. For a little while they kept together, but at last Mamie, who never was contented with one thing long at a time, took it into her head to canter as hard as she could, and asked Jack to race with her.

"No, Mamie!" warned Rhoda, "you know we promised mamma—at least I did—that we would not try racing. She was afraid to have us go so fast."

"Oh well, *I* didn't promise not to, and my mother didn't tell me not to, so I'll go it with you, Mame," said Robbie. "Mamma won't care a snap, if we don't go too fast."

So they started, but Mamie was not so brave, after all, and kept



ROBBIE GOT AHEAD OF HER.

"White Bess" back a little, and presently Robbie got ahead of her and was far up the road, when she decided to head him off by a short cut over a road to the left. She hesitated a moment, however, knowing that her "short cuts" were not always successful in the end, and remembering that she had lost her way once or twice in consequence. But to come out upon the other road, and ahead of Robbie, would be such fun, and she was sure she knew the way, for Jack had showed her once when they had been walking. So "White Bess" was turned aside, and a brisk trot brought them out upon the main road again, so Mamie thought. Alas! again she had miscalculated distance, and this time there was no friendly farmer coming along to set her right. She had gone some distance already, and now that she was quite alone on her horse began to be rather timid. "White Bess" seemed so large, and she pricked up her ears in such a queer way. Mamie fancied dreadful things about to happen, and her poor little heart was thumping loudly.

But she went on slowly until at last she drew near a house which she recognized as one which Jack had pointed out one day when they were all carriage-riding, as "the witch's house," and he had told her wonderful stories about the dreadful old lady who lived there and enticed little girls in, and shut them up, etc., etc. All a pack of nonsense, which Mamie had laughed at then, but which now she remembered with serious misgivings. And while



HE AGREED TO BE ESCORT FOR THE LITTLE MAIDEN.

she was wondering what she should do, the door opened and the old lady came out upon the porch. She looked very kind and nice, in spite of her long pointed nose and chin, and when she spoke to Mamie her voice was very kind.

"Little girl, aren't you afraid to ride quite alone upon the road?" she asked. "I saw you from my window, and you looked a little afraid of something. Can I help you?"

Then Mamie told her story, and asked to be shown the right way.

"Oh, dear!" she added, "I'm forever getting lost, and I don't see why it is."

"I would try and be more careful if I were you," said the old lady. Then glancing down the road she exclaimed: "Why, this is fortunate. Here comes Dr. Jones. Now he is going your way and will show you how to get home easily."

So she beckoned to the old country doctor who came jogging along, and told him about Mamie's plight, and he heartily agreed to be escort for the little maiden until she was safe at home.

As they rode home—the little girl and the doctor—he proved a very entertaining companion, and told Mamie all about the place and its people, out beyond the village, where there were only scattered homes, and the neighbors had long distances to ride when they wanted to be sociable. He told her about the coasting down hill which the country boys so much enjoyed, and about the

school entertainments, and the candy frolics to which everybody went so as to keep up the fun, and make good times for each other, and Mamie declared she would like to spend the winter in the country if only she could do so. And while they were nearing home, Robbie and Jack, and Rhoda, who had been going about the other road in great trouble, trying to find their missing Mamie, had at last cantered home as fast as possible, to ask that Jem might ride out and hunt her up.

As they drew near the gate, Jack said, "There's a tall boy coming up the road. I wonder who he is, anyway! I never saw him before!"

But Robbie, after following the direction of Jack's eyes, gave a loud yell, and sprang off his pony, running with all speed to meet the stranger.

"Frank,—oh, Frank! Hello! Oh, Frankie!"

"Why, it's Rob's big brother Frank!" said Rhoda to Jack. "I don't believe any one knew he was coming."

"S'pose he thought it would be no end of a joke to surprise 'em all," said Jack, feeling a little jealous of the intruder who would no doubt deprive him of much of Rob's society now.

Meanwhile Robbie was learning from his brother how—owing to some private matter of the Professor's at school—the boys had been given a short time of vacation, and Frank had decided to take his family by surprise and "put in an appearance" some

fine day at the Wakely Home. He had arrived during the absence of Robbie and Mamie, but Gracie had discovered him as he drove up to the house in Stephen's old stage. Her wild screams of delight and surprise had drawn Mrs. Moore to the door, and Frank's welcome had been very gratifying, you may be sure. He had started out to meet the equestrians, thinking they would probably be close at hand, when Robbie espied him, and now, after the first words of welcome, the big brother learned about the disappearance of Mamie, and was made acquainted with Jack and Rhoda at the same time.

"Lend me your horse, will you, one of you?" he said. "I'll soon find Mame."

"Take mine, please," Jack replied, springing to the ground, and presently Frank was off and far up the road, his eyes searching far and near for his missing little sister.

And it was not long before he saw her coming along demurely enough by the side of her entertaining escort, the good old



FRANK SEARCHES FOR HIS SISTER.



SAM'S ACCIDENT.

Doctor Jones. You can imagine the expression of her face and the joy in her heart when she beheld her much-loved brother in the road before her. Such a happy surprise! and such a cry of "Frank! it's Frank!" Doctor Jones was introduced, and then he resigned his charge into Frank's hands, after receiving a very sweet "thank you, sir," from Mamie, and a shake of her little hand.

The brother and sister had much to talk about on the way home, but, after all, Mamie was obliged to ride on ahead of her brother, and report the fact that they had witnessed an accident just below the bend of the road, and Frank had waited to help. "It was those boys who were at the picnic," she said to Jack. "That one you called 'Sam,' and the other one, I don't remember his name. But they were getting nuts, and Sam fell and hurt his arm, and Frank waited to help get him home, and he made me come on."

Jack at once started for the place, and after Sam had been carried to his home with a broken arm, much to the distraction of his widowed and frightened mother, Jack volunteered to hunt up Doctor Jones, while Frank returned to his family, and at last found time for a comfortable family talk.

What a nice time the schoolboy had during his little vacation! There were the nice long walks, the visit to Gretchie's little home (for of course he must be introduced to her), the drives to the

lake, where old Tom was introduced and where they all went out on the lake in his boat, the nutting parties, the rides in the saddle, which were all the more enjoyable because of the big brother's presence. They could go down to Lake Waramaug oftener now than before, for was not Frank with them to keep them out of mischief, though to be sure he was full of boyish pranks himself, and delighted the boys with his nonsense whenever he felt in the mood for exhibiting it. Jack liked to listen to the accounts of Frank's boarding-school life too, and felt that he could not be quite happy until he had tested the same experience, and put on long pants such as Frank wore.

The autumn days were all too speedy to suit Frank, who had already begun to weary of his school life, and he jokingly told his mother that his health needed a longer vacation than he was likely to have.

But, all the same, word was received from the Professor that school would reopen in a fortnight, and Frank's face grew rueful as he read the letter.

It was handed him with one also for his mother from her husband in Liverpool, and the children were waiting to hear the latter read aloud as soon as it had had mamma's first, private perusal.

Meanwhile they hung about Frank, full of regrets over the contents of his letter.

"It's the hatefulest thing to have you go, when it's so nice to have you here!" complained Robbie, and Mamie joined in loudly with uncharitable wishes that the Professor would be sick, and not able to open school for ever so long.

"But never mind, Frankie!" said gentle Gracie, always ready to pour the oil of her sweet temper on troubled waters. "Never mind; you know we'll be going home soon, and then you won't have to envy us, Frank, dear, 'cause we'll be only in the old city, and can't be having such fun."

Mamma looked up from her letter with a smile, and joined in the conversation.

"I don't know, little Gracie," she said, "about you're being so soon in the 'old city,' after all; and Frank dear, I think you may put off that rueful expression of yours, and write to Professor M. that you will not be able to return to school yet awhile."

She couldn't help laughing as she watched the young faces turned so quickly to her.

"Mamma! what do you mean?" from Gracie.

"Mamma, are you in sober earnest?" from Frank.

"Jolly!" and "Oh, what larks!" from Mamie and Robbie.

"Well, listen to papa's letter," said Mrs. Moore, and she read it aloud.

Of course there were lots of loving messages and all that, and descriptions of where the papa had been, and of his doings, but



DOWN BY THE LAKE.

the most interesting part of his letter, I think, to the children, was that portion which told them of the fact that important business would keep him absent, he feared, through most of the winter, and if they preferred they could remain just where they were, and try the fun of a winter in the country, or return to the city, and have as good a time without him as possible. In either case he thought it best that Frank should be with them, and being the eldest of the children, and a "big fellow," he must take his father's place in caring for mamma, and helping her take care of the younger fry, etc., etc.

Mrs. Moore didn't want to go back to a house which without its lord and master would be so lonely to her, and she was therefore very ready to yield to the persuasions of her children and Mr. and Mrs. Wakely, and decide to remain where she was.

There was great rejoicing on the part of Rhoda and Jack, and even little Guilo, when the decision was made known, and Chloe could not resist her word of congratulation on the occasion.

"'Clar' to man, ef I hain't glad dat dis yere house ain't gwine ter be bereaved of its liveliness wid dose honnies of chillen, what are always so civil to even a ole black thing like Chlo'. It's done did me a powerful lot of good jes' seein' 'em around, now, I tole yer!"

So Frank sent his letter to the Professor, and drew a long breath of relief when it was fairly started. Then he went out to

the barn, followed by a delighted audience, and exhibited his skill as an athlete, by way of celebrating his new-born freedom from school duties ; and it must be confessed that for a little time the small brother and sisters were so engrossed with the delightful prospect before them, that they quite forgot to be sorry at the still longer absence from the dear father whom they loved so dearly, and really longed to see.



CHAPTER XVIII.

A THANKSGIVING GATHERING.



THANKSGIVING DAY was close at hand, and there were glad anticipations on the part of our little people. There was to be a Thanksgiving frolic, and hosts of young folks had been invited.

And where do you suppose the invitation came from? Why, from the little old lady whose acquaintance Mamie had made, you remember, on the day of the last horseback ride. Chance had renewed the acquaintance since that day, and through Mamie and Dr. Jones, all the children of the Wakely House had grown to be pleasantly familiar with the kind little woman, and Jack had been heartily ashamed of himself for the silly tales he had concocted for fun's sake about her. On their rides they had frequently passed her quaint and roomy old house, and by this time knew they were welcome whenever they wished to stop and have a chat. She knew a great many little folks around the place, but it somehow happened that with Jack and Rhoda she had never



A CANDY PULL.

made acquaintance until Mamie's adventure brought it about, and the children were now wondering why it had been so that they had never known the dear little old lady before.

"She's got an awful sharp peak on her nose and chin," said Jack, "but I love 'em, even if they do look queer, and I think they're a lot prettier than a pug nose and a flat chin like some other folks have."

Rhoda knew her brother's speech was a "hit" at the minister's solemn wife, because the latter had on Sunday reproved him for yawning during the "ninthly" in her husband's sermon.

So now Miss Blanchard (that was the old lady's name) had decided to have a real Thanksgiving frolic, and had invited, as I have said, a number of little people of all ages and sizes, to meet at her house on the morning of the great "Day," and have first a "candy pull," then a good dinner, then games and all kinds of fun. She was rich, but often lonely, and it would do her heart good (so she said to the old family servants who had served her many years) to fill the house with young life once in a while.

Oh, what excitement there was amongst the children when her invitations were received; and how anxiously the day was longed for!

At last it came. The old-fashioned house was full indeed of "young life"—as Miss Blanchard had desired, and some grown folks were also present. The fun began at half-past ten in the

morning, and it was not long before the little folks were "at it, full swing" (so Dr. Jones expressed it, for he was there, of course to enjoy the good time, like any boy amongst them).

The candy-pull was a success, and if we don't speak of the tricks the boys played on the girls with the sticky mess they contrived to work into little balls,—and if we say nothing about the growls of the old cook, who declared she had something better to do than "wipe up spilt 'lasses,"—and if we refrain from mentioning the fact that it was hard and troublesome—a little later—to comb from curly locks sundry lumps of soft and half-pulled candy which somehow had wandered from the kettle to lodge amongst those curls,—why, then we can say that the candy-pull was a wonderful success.

There were all kinds of games, too, and "Blind-man's Buff" was especially liked by Jack and Robbie as well, indeed, as by all the boys of the party, for it was a lucky girl who escaped a hug from strong young arms, and, I may add, a kiss as well.

Miss Blanchard's pointed nose and chin were in constant contact, owing to her smiling face, and not a child went unnoticed or uncared for by her kindly attentions.

Then, in due time, came the dinner. Oh, the dinner! And oh, the appetites! Do you think I can begin to describe all those children put into their little stomachs? Why, I could not attempt it. Jack was only restrained from a fifth piece of chicken

pie by a nudge from Frank Moore, who whispered also, "Don't be more of a p-i-g than you need be in order to live at all."

And Robbie, having filled both pockets with nuts and candies, would have borrowed Frank's pockets as well, if that young man had not utterly refused to loan them for so ignominious an object.

"Say, Jack," whispered Rhoda to her brother, when finally the grand dinner was concluded, and the little people as well as children of larger growth had returned to the parlor—"say, don't you think it would be fun to make a rhyme and thank Miss Blanchard for her kindness to us?"

"All right," whispered Jack in reply, "but who'll write it?"

"Oh, we'll all do it together, and we won't tell any one 'cept Frank, so's it'll be a surprise, you see."

So Mamie and Gracie were consulted, and the quartette of little friends withdrew to a distant corner of the room in order to concoct the most suitable style of rhyme for the occasion. Frank should know about it later, and maybe he would recite it for them.

Meanwhile, Miss Blanchard was noting the fact that there was a sort of quiet settling down over the company. Just a hint of stupidity, you know, as if every one had come to the end of their rope of fun, and didn't know what next to do.

"Dear, dear, little people," she said merrily, "this will never



THE THANKSGIVING DINNER.

do! You're all too quiet now, and I long for some noise. Let me see!" She pondered a moment, then—"Oh, I have it! How would you like to play at Tableaux?"

A merry chorus of young voices responded in various ways. Then she called her old butler and had him arrange the chairs in semicircles about the large parlor, while she carried a few little girls off with her, and upstairs to the "most delightful old attic in the world." There she opened an old-fashioned hair-covered trunk, and allowed the children to select any dress they pleased from amongst the relics of "auld lang syne." "Now, you shall be dressed up in these gowns, dearies," she said, "and I'm sure we'll have quite a pretty set of Tableaux with which to entertain our audience."

You may be sure the girls were delighted with the idea, and when Miss Blanchard and her maid had dressed them, and gotten them all ready to go down and take their turns before the audience, when the folding-doors connecting the front and back parlor should be opened—a prettier, sweeter bevy of little people of "ye olden time" it would have been hard to find.

Rhoda came first. There were, maybe, nine or ten in the number chosen for the tableaux, but I can only find space for four pictures here, though each tableau was beautiful.

Rhoda represented a little high-born damsel of very ancient time, and as she stood before the cheval glass, seemingly lost in

admiration of herself, there was much clapping of hands, and loud applause.

Mamie posed next as a "Grandma," and a very lovely little grandma (minus age and wrinkles) she made for the delighted spectators.

Miss Annie, the young school-teacher (for Miss Blanchard had not omitted to invite her also to the Thanksgiving frolic), was to sing a song for the audience, and was dressed in a fine old-time white embroidered gown.

Out in the little dressing-room she waited until her turn came, while Robbie, Mamie, and Rhoda admired her to their heart's content. Little Gracie was going over with Frank, in a snug corner, the remarkable production, "The Rhyme of the Quartette," which he suggested she should recite when her turn came, although she had implored him to be spokesman.

"No, little sis," he said laughingly, "it will sound better from you; and now read it over and learn it all by heart, and then bravely speak it out when you go before the audience."

So she was conning it over, and was still busy with it when Miss Annie was called to give her song.

When the song was finished, and an "encore" had been rendered, poor little Gracie, as frightened as she could be, was called upon to come forward. Miss Blanchard's old cat, Tom, followed the child in, and there they stood together, Gracie

and "Tom," before the smiling audience, making, as you will



MISS ANNIE.

believe, a very beautiful picture of a little lady of "auld lang syne."



TABLEAU (RHODA).

A moment's silence, and then the red lips parted, a quick flush spread itself over the sweet, shy face, and Gracie began :

“THE RHYME OF THE QUARTETTE.

O, thank you, kind Miss Blanchard,
We've had a lovely time,
And, now we want to thank you
In our beautifullest rhyme.

We know we are not poets,
Like grown-up folks, you see,
But you'll excuse all errors
From little folks, and we

Will tell you that you've made us
Have a fine Thanksgiving day,
And every minute in it
Has been beautiful and gay.

And now we hope you'll always
Be happy and be glad,
And we hope you'll have no worries
To make your heart feel sad.

And—and ”—

Gracie turned beseeching glances in Frank's direction, but he had disappeared, and there was no one to prompt her, so with more blushes she added, “ Please, I've forgotten the rest,” and fled from the scene, leaving a sympathetic audience behind to admire and to pity her.



“GRANDMA.”

She didn't feel much better when behind the screen she encountered Robbie, who, more frank than polite, informed her that she was the only one who "fizzled" through the performance.

But in spite of that one little failure, which was really nothing at all in the eyes of the audience, everything went off beautifully, and the afternoon was filled with games, music, dancing, and later on a good-by song, for which Miss Annie played the accompaniment.

Then amid exclamations of what a good time each had enjoyed, and hand-shaking all around, the company separated, and Miss Blanchard, standing at her door leaning on her stick, watched her friends, the old and new, as they went their various ways.

"Sure, my leddy," remarked the faithful old butler, as he closed the door at last upon outside sounds and scenes, "You're fit for your bed with all the tire and fuss of this day."

"Never mind that, John," she said; "an old woman like me had better be tired now and then, than to grow rusty with selfishness; and I know I have made a number very happy to-day, and helped promote perhaps a kindly feeling amongst all my neighbors which, without this social gathering, might have grown into an unneighborly indifference."

"But you are so tired now, my leddy! You should think some of yourself."

"Well, well, my good John, my time of rest is near, you

know, and I shall no longer be able to think of others. Let the old woman keep young amongst young folks a little while longer, eh?"

And while she contemplated the confusion and desolation of the rooms so lately filled with young life and merriment, her late guests went happily home, holding in their hearts grateful and loving remembrance of her; and so ended at last the glad Thanksgiving Day.



CHAPTER XIX.

WINTER AT LAST !



AND now the winter has fairly arrived. There has been a snowstorm in the night, and all the fields and hills lie in robes of glistening white under the bright sunshine of the morning before Christmas day.

"Come along, Robbie," cries Jack, soon after breakfast, "there's splendid coasting and some of the fellows are at it already. Come along."

So they haul Jack's sled from its corner in the barn, and start off together, while the girls huddle around the fire in the sunny, cozy sitting-room, and do a little dress-making for their dolls. As the boys proceed on their way

towards the hill where already some of the older lads are enjoying their sport, they pass a little "mound," as Robbie disdainfully terms it, where some very small boys are having a jollification all their own. They have warned the bigger fellows to keep off, and by way of showing a claim to their little hill, they have planted a flag upon it, which the peaceable and youngest member of the flock has named "the flag of truce," thinking thereby to disarm



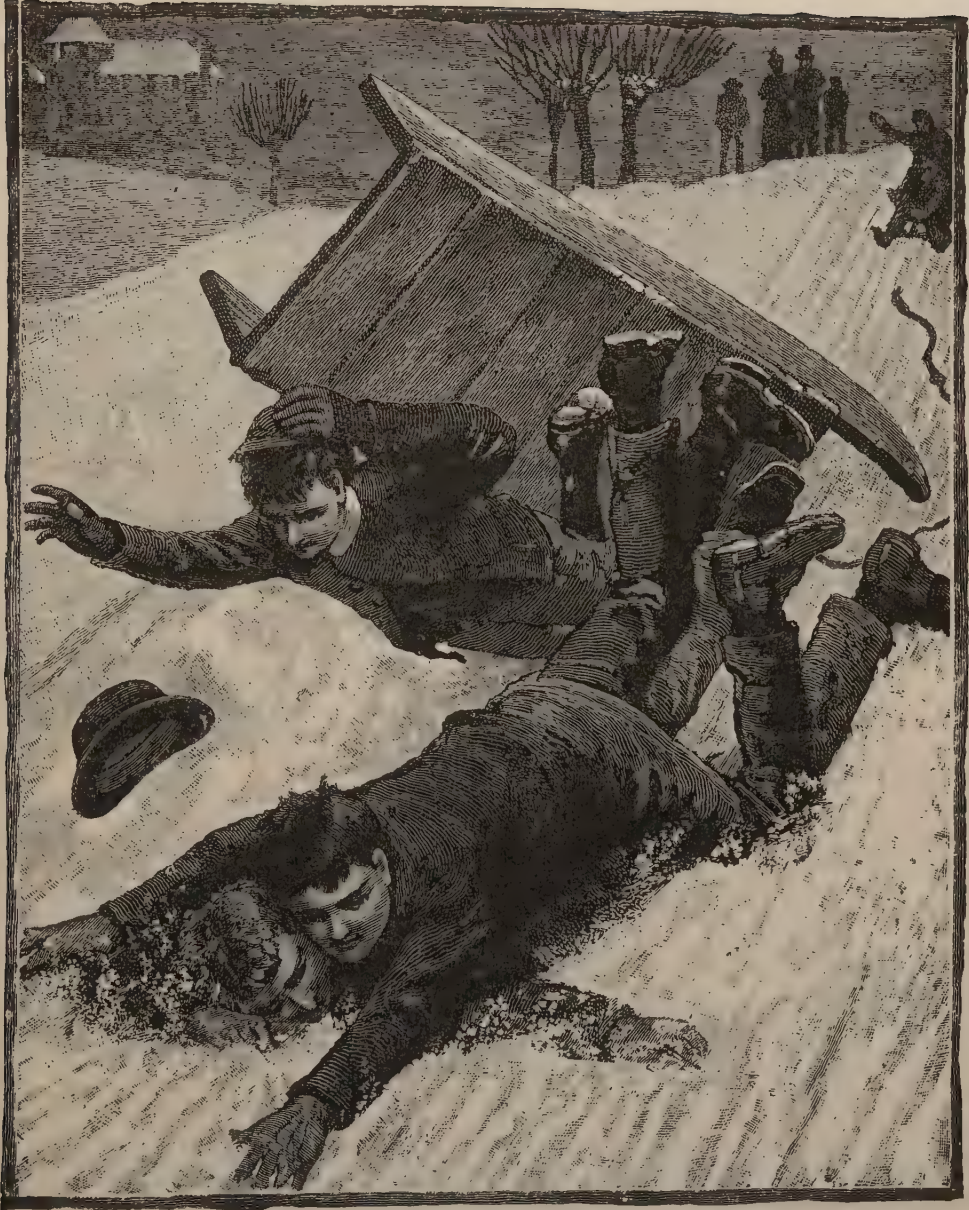
the stronger boys of any possible inclination to "bully" and tease them. Just now they are having considerable sport out of an old tin waiter which has been discarded, and was found by the boys in a heap of rubbish soon after gathering upon their little "mound." The smallest of their number have made a sled, or toboggan of it, and to see them wabbling down over the smooth

and icy snow is such a comical sight, that Jack and Robbie burst into laughter.

"Needn't laugh at us, you two fellows, 'cause you're big an' can use the big hill," says little Johnny White, puffing his scrap of a figure until he is like a turkey-cock.

"Oh ho! he! he!" laughs Jack. "I'm so full of pity for you and your 'mound,' your little 'snow heap,' that I'll just give you a bit of fun to show you my sympathy. Say, Rob, watch us, now."

So Jack drags his large sled to the very highest part of the little hill, invites the boys to seat themselves upon it, assuring them that there is "room for all," and crowding them on, much to their delight, until the sled is fairly full. Then, with a sly wink at Robbie (which unfortunately for the little fellows, they do not see), he takes his place behind his passengers, and starts. Thus far, everything seems smooth sailing, and is real fun in anticipation to the boys, but presently over goes the sled, and out spills its frightened freight, rolling and screaming head over heels into the snow-bank along the way. It is an unfair thing to do, and Jack knows it. Robbie knows it, too, and the little boys who have been so tricked know it more keenly still. But boys will be boys, and a good joke is to them a "good joke" too often, when they do not pause to reflect that it may possibly also be something beside the so-called "joke." Little Johnny White is hurt quite



"SERVES US RIGHT."

severely, and one or two others are bruised, while all are wounded in their feelings, not so much because of the actual spill, but because they feel that Jack has duped them. Robbie laughs at the affair as heartily as does Jack himself, but he does have the grace to pick some of the little chaps up.

Then, as soon as the snow has been brushed out of necks and hair, and from under jackets, and the indignant little figures are upright again—what a tirade of shrill voices Jack has to laughingly shut his ears against !

“ You’re a great big meany ! that’s what you are ! and we hope you’ll have a big tumble the first thing from your horrid old sled.”

This from the spokesman of the victimized party, as he shakes a little clenched fist after Jack and Robbie, who are now proceeding on their way.

“ I say, Jack, it *was* kind of mean in you,” says Rob. “ Those little duffers expected a no end good time ; but it was awfully funny to watch ’em spill,” and he laughs again. To tell the truth Jack is beginning to feel twinges of compunction for his joke, and it seems suddenly to have been a bad one instead of as “ good ” as he had thought it.

“ I s’pose it was,” he says, rather soberly, “ and I don’t just feel in my heart that mamma would think it fair either, and—and you see, Robin, that hurts more than the—the joke does.”

"Yes, of course," assents Robbie. "You see, I guess she'd think it was the cheating part more than the upset that was so mean. Anyway, some time we can tell the boys we're sorry for 'em." And then reaching their comrades on the hill, Jack and Rob begin to prepare for their own ride down the steep incline, calling one of their fellows to join them.

"Now then, Rob and Jim? One, two, three, and away goes she!"

A rush, a breeze which cuts sharply across the young and eager faces, and then—whew! the runners strike against some hard substance in the road, and there is a "spill" which would delight the hearts of Jack's late victims could they be there to behold it.

"Hi! this is a mess!" shouts Rob rather jerkily.

"Serves us right!" responds Jack as well as he can with a mouth full of snow.

"Serves who right, I'd like to know?" grumbles and mumbles Jim, who is underneath Jack, and "mad as a March hare" in the bargain. "*I ain't* been doing anything to earn this confounded old muss, anyway! Get off of a fellow, Jack Wakely. Get off I say!"

"Well, ain't I trying to, I'd like to know?"

"Ouch! let up!" "Gilkicker mush!"

All these exclamations are so much fun added to the "spill,"

for the boys who have gathered to look on, but finally the three



fallen ones are on their legs again, and the coasting is continued without further accident.

When Jack and Robbie go home to dinner, they hope to meet some of the little fellows whom they have determined to "make up" with after their ill-treatment of the early morning, but none of them are about now, and the "making up" must be postponed. However our two boys relieve their pricking consciences by the "honest confession" which is so "good for one's soul" (as the old saying runs), and are not five minutes at home before the mothers and sisters know all about everything, and they get well laughed at for the vengeance which overtook them according to Johnny



White's amiable wish. After dinner little Guilo reports that Jem,

the hired man, said there was skating on the pond below the sheep pasture, and asks if he may go.



"We'll all go," cries Jack, flinging his cap in air as usual. "Come, don't you want to join us, girls?"

"All right," replies Rhoda gleefully.

"We're ready."

"Why, can you skate?" asks Gracie with a little wonder in her voice.

"Can't I, though?" from Rhoda, "as can you, if you'll try the least bit to learn. Mame, you will, I know, won't you?"

"Just try me and see," is Mamie's ready answer, and in a few moments they are all off, with Frank, who has promised his mother that no harm shall come to them—neither bumps nor bruises, broken heads or limbs.

The pond is not very extensive, but quite large enough for them to spread themselves over it for as good a time as they want. There are plenty of other skaters present, and the air rings with merry voices.

Gracie allows a pair of skates to be strapped to her little feet,



and stands upon them very timidly when Frank places his hands upon her shoulders and gently moves her forward. But she is shaking all over, and her blue eyes are as wide open as her mouth, as she clutches her big brother's hand and lets her feet slip as far apart as possible.



Mamie, more venturesome, struggles and wobbles about like a dumpling, and Robbie—who has tried just “one skate,” as he called it, in the Park at home one winter—feels quite like a veteran, and tilting his small chin in the air, does his best to keep up the bold appearance he is far from feeling. Jack, and Rhoda, too, of course are at home on their skates, and excite the almost wrathful envy of our three little Moores, as they glide gaily, hand in hand, over the glittering surface of the pond.

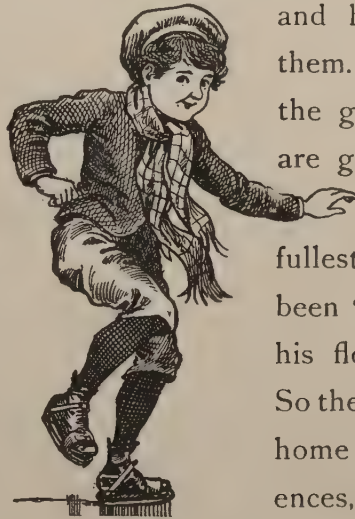
There are lots of bumps, and crashes, falls, and scrambles, and now and then a real hurt. Robbie and Mamie come together rather more suddenly than is pleasant. Gracie, being without Frank's protection for a minute or so, is made the unexpected target for a



number of careless skaters, and down she goes with a little yell which is lost amid the laughter of the tumblers.

Robbie gets a fall which knocks the conceit out of him surprisingly soon, but Jack skates on in calm disdain of all such trifling affairs, and Frank and Rhoda have a "skim" together in blissful ignorance of these mishaps. As for little Guilo, he has been so lost in admiration of the scene that the few bumps upon his curly head are counted nothing,

pride in exhibiting
serious happens to spoil
and by, when cheeks
sparkling, and the
been appreciated to the
wisely thinks there has
a good thing, and calls
the homeward march.
road and are soon
their varied experi-



and he feels quite a
them. But nothing ser-
the good time, and by
are glowing, and eyes
"goodtime" has
fullest extent, Frank
been "just enough" of
his flock together for
So they troop along the
home again, to relate
ences, and exhibit their

bruises with great gusto. Frank has promised Robbie a pair of handsome skates (to be purchased out of his, Frank's, next remittance from papa) when he shall have learned to skate as well as Jack Wakely; and the little boy is determined to practice upon every patch of ice he can find, until the skates are his at last.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CHRISTMAS TIME ARRIVES.



AFTER supper a storm comes up, and rain and wind blow wildly about the house.

"Dear me," whines Jack. "I do hope it will be pleasant to-morrow—Christmas day! It is so hard to have a rainy Christmas, you know."

The children gather about the window and look anxiously skyward for some faint promise of a clearing off. And while they are there, Mrs. Wakely has an idea which she smilingly and in low whispers communicates to Mrs. Moore. That lady in a few moments calls Frank to her side, and both mammas then make him their confidante in a plan which seems to please him much, for he nods and nods, and twinkles a merry glance in the direction of the children at the window. Presently Guilo comes eagerly in to say that Jem has found a lame crow in the woodshed, and won't Jack come out and see it?

"Oh, bring it in!" cries Rhoda, and the big black thing is



TO WATCH THE CROW'S HOBBLING MOVEMENTS.

speedily introduced to civilized society in the sitting-room, where it remains the chief attraction for a while. Then it stalks gravely out into the hall, where Frank, Mamie, Jack, and Guilo sit down on the stairs to watch its hobbling movements, and Gracie steals away to her little room to finish the purse she is crocheting for Mamie, and on which she has been so hindered by her sister's constant presence all day.

"Come, it's time you youngsters cleared off to bed," sings out Frank at last, when the old crow



GRACIE CROCHETS ON HER LITTLE PURSE.

has finally ceased to be a curiosity. (He has an errand to do, you see, and can attend to it the more easily when the prying eyes and curious tongues of his little comrades are out of the way.)

"Bed-time, bed-time," grumbles Mamie, "it's always bed-time."

"Good-night, dearies!" calls out mamma from the sitting-room, hearing the complaint and appreciating Frank's feelings also.

"Good-night" from headquarters of course settles the business, so the little folks reluctantly go upstairs; and before very long the big boy Frank has started out in the storm to carry out the wishes of the two mammas, and invite a few young people to the house for the Christmas evening, and so make a "surprise party" for our little folks, who meanwhile are discussing the Christmas, and getting themselves ready for bed at the same time, with not the faintest shadow of an idea concerning the pleasant plan for their enjoyment on the following night.

And as Frank goes the rounds, receiving from each invited guest—or from their mothers (the children naturally being in bed at this hour)—an acceptance of the invitation, his little sisters are talking of the morrow, and wondering if Christmas in the country can possibly be like a city Christmas, when there are no stores to help "Santa Claus" in the performance of his duties.

Robbie calls out from his little room (adjoining theirs): "Of course you girls won't like it so well, 'cause you're used to your

party mamma gives you, you know, on Christmas night—but I, being a boy, you see, like it no end better, 'cause if we were home, I'd have to—I mean, if we had another party—I'd have to be all the time being polite to the girls who come, and I'd have to kind of loaf round 'em and be a gentleman, you see, and sometimes a feller gets tired of that, and wants to be just a boy."

"Yes," says Mamie, "I know boys don't like parties much, but it's real fun for girls. Rhode's got a lovely party-picture hanging in her room. Oh, it is just be-yew-tiful!

Mamie is emphatic in the pronunciation of her adjective, and appeals to Gracie to prove the truth of her assertion. "And"—she adds—"it makes me think of how you did behave with that sweet little Lillie Joice you had to dance with last Christmas. This picture is about a little girl and boy, only the boy is smaller than the girl, and is a quiet-looking little boy,—just as if he would be as good as gold. But he looks lots like you in the way he's dressed;—you know you wore that velvet suit, and the broad lace collar, and mamma said considering you were only nine, she guessed it wasn't too babyish, you remember. Well, the boy in Rhoda's picture has the same kind of a collar on, and everything, and oh! it's just be-yewtiful!"

"And it's got a little rhyme on the back of the frame," chimes in Gracie. "Oh, you ought to see it. Wait! I'll go and get it



MY LITTLE PARTNER.

for you. I can slip upstairs; no one'll catch me in my night-gown, and mamma won't care." She is gone on the instant, and Robbie says. "I'd lots rather see a picture of a feller doing something 'sides dancing. That's so girley, you know."

"'Tis'nt either, Robin Moore; why, great men dance, and they're not girley. Anyway this is a lovely picture, and I like it. I don't believe you'd catch that boy pinning his partner's sash to the sash on the next girl, as you did to poor Lillie, and making every one laugh at 'em."

"Pooh!" sniffs Robbie, not caring to dwell upon the memory of that occasion, which included also a remembrance of his having been sent out of the room for various naughtinesses. "That was only fun, and a good joke. Girls can't take in the sense of such things, you see. Where did Rhoda get it?"

"Get what?"

"Why, the picture?"

"Oh! her father gave it to her for her last birthday. He found it somewhere in a store in New York, and he thought it looked like Rhoda; but I don't. She isn't half so good-looking. Here's Gracie."

Gracie comes in—a pretty little picture herself, in her soft white night-robe, and her fair hair floating over her shoulders—and holds up the "be-yewtiful" picture Rhoda has permitted her to bring down for Robbie's edification. On the back of the

frame, written with pencil, because Mr. Wakely had composed and put them there very hurriedly one day to please Rhoda (who always wants descriptions of every picture she sees, whether true or imaginary), are the verses Gracie liked so well, and I will repeat them for you.

MY LITTLE PARTNER.

Oh, it was fun on the party-night !

I tell you we had a chance

To show the people that little folks, too,

Knew perfectly well how to dance.

There were boys and boys, and they coaxed the girls

To dance till they tired us out,

But I'd the best partner of any one there,—

He beat all the boys about.

He was only Rollo, my brother, and he

Was only just seven years old ;

But he said if I'd take him he'd do his best,

And dance the way he was told.

He looked so cunning ! Black velvet suit

With broad lace collar and all,

And I didn't care if he was too short,

Or I—I might say—too tall.

I buttoned his gloves, and he led me up

With the pride of a little king,

And I scowled at a boy who asked me "why

I chose such a little thing

To be my partner? and didn't I think
If I tied him on to my back
I could keep him safer?" "I chose him," said I,
"For the *sense* that some other folks lack."

And Rollo and I went through the dance
With not a mistake at all;
And the girls all patted the dimpled cheeks
Of my partner so cunning and small.

And when the party was over, he said,
In a dear little whisper to me,
"I'd the prettiest partner in all the room,
For I danced with my sister, you see."

And now the Christmas morning at last! Gracie bounds out of bed early in the dawn and goes to the window. To her delight the ground is covered with snow, soft, fleecy and white as far as eye can reach. She proclaims the fact to her little companions as soon as she can reach their bedsides, and by a "hurrying up" the dressing process, there is time for a game at snow-balling before the breakfast bell rings.

After breakfast the presents, such as there are, are given to the eager children, who in turn present to the "grown-ups" such little gifts as they have managed slyly to manufacture together.

There is much fun, and a great deal of surprise (whether sincere or pretended) as each article is produced, and Jack's grin of delight, as his father hands him a handsome pocketbook pretty

well stuffed with silver coin, is something amusing for every one to see.

Mrs. Moore, who has had an express parcel safely hidden in the closet of her room for some days, is glad to free herself of the secret at last, as she distributes the contents of the parcel around amongst the little ones, not forgetting, either, Mr. and Mrs. Wakely, Chloe, Jem, Bill, and Guilo. Nor indeed is little Gretchen forgotten, and in the afternoon, after a hearty and bountiful dinner—and while Rhoda is called to help mamma about something, Gracie receives permission from her mother to go and see Gretchen a little while, and take to her, and the hard-working mother, some very substantial tokens of a kind remembrance.

Mamie doesn't want to leave a new fairy-book in which she is deeply interested, and Rhoda, yet busy with mamma, can not go. Jack and Robin are off on some fun of their own, so Gracie musters courage to start off quite alone on her errand.

Rhoda stands in the kitchen-door throwing crumbs to the snow-birds, and as Gracie goes past the gate, she calls out, "Good-by, Gracie! but wait, I'll bring an umbrella lest it should snow some more. Just as likely as not it will."

"Snow?" repeats Gracie, looking up at the sky, now full of sunshine which has turned the snow-banks into a mass of glittering gems. "Snow? why, it won't think of doing such a silly thing. I'll be back soon, anyhow. Good-by, dearie."

"Good-by!" echoes Rhoda, turning her attention again to the greedy little birds until mamma is ready for her to beat the eggs for the lovely custard now in preparation for the coming supper-time.

So Gracie trudges on, and is soon with Gretchen in the little brown house, where on this Christmas day everything is so peaceful and happy. Gretchen has fixed up a little tree for the baby brother, and a few small toys, such as Mrs. Sterne could find at the one store in the village, hang from the miniature boughs.

"Ve had a 'Christ-child' once," says Gretchen, as Gracie admires the little tree, "but this time ve vas mitout any, and somehow the tree seem bare. But ve has Him mit our hearts"—laying her hand upon her bosom, and lifting her blue eyes to the sky.

"But," says Gracie, "here are some more things for your Christmas. See?" and she displays the contents of her basket. Some pretty fancy articles for Gretchie and her mother, both useful and ornamental; a splendid big cake; some fruit and some candies, and, last but not least, some pretty toys for baby.

Gretchen almost screams with delight, not only for her own share, but for mamma's and baby's. And the German mother stoops to put a kiss on Gracie's fair forehead, as she says:

"Tell thy moder, mine child, that in the name of the Christ-child ve vas overflowing with the thanks for her."



ONLY A FEW FLUTTERING SNOWFLAKES.

Gracie stays a little while with Gretchen, and enjoys playing with Baby Hans, until finally, as the sunbeams seem suddenly to have flown from the sky, she recalls Rhoda's prophecy concerning the snow. So she hurriedly bids her friends good-by, and, not wishing to hurt Gretchie's feelings, accepts for use in case of need the rather clumsy cotton umbrella which the little German girl insists upon fetching for her. Then she starts on her homeward way, with a large pie of Mrs. Sterne's manufacture in her basket, a pretty piece of worsted lace, which Gretchen had made, in her pocket, a kiss from Baby's red lips, and a cheery, warm glow in her heart. The walk home is rather lonely, and the afternoon is waning, but Gracie keeps briskly on her way, gratefully remembering the cheerful home and scenes awaiting her.

"But I do wish Mamie had come with me," she can not help thinking, pretty soon, when a cloud sweeps across the sky, and she feels something cold and wet upon the tip of her little nose. There are only a few fluttering snow-flakes falling, and Gracie doesn't take the trouble to put up the big umbrella; but she feels dreary and lonely all of a sudden, and the way home—usually so short—seems to have stretched out to a wonderful length.

The "snow-flurry" lasts only a few moments, but Gracie is growing very nervous, and there is a little quiver of her eyelids which betokens tears well on the way up from the timid heart.



GOING TO MEET GRACIE.

Meanwhile Mamie, having grown restless and missing her sister, despite the new book and its interesting stories—has determined at last to go and meet Gracie. Jack and Robbie are still absent. Rhoda (to whom Mrs. Wakely has confided her secret of the invited evening guests) is still helping—as busily as she can, without attracting Mamie's curiosity—in the preparation of certain refreshments for the young people who are coming ; and thus, like Gracie, Mamie has to start forth upon her walk quite alone.

Twilight approaches, and the snow-flakes are just beginning to flutter like stray feathers in the air, though few and far between. Humming a little song she goes eagerly along the road, keeping her bright eyes ahead on the lookout for Gracie. One by one the snow-flakes increase, until, when at last the two little girls come face to face, the trees and bushes are beginning to look “furry and fluffy,” as Gracie calls it, and there is no more doubt but that a second snow-storm will follow upon that of last night. Together they make all haste to the house, and there is Mamma Moore standing anxiously at the door on the watch for her two little lambs.

They shake off the snow, and hurry in to the glowing sitting-room fire to warm the chilly little fingers and toes.

“Supper will be ready before long, dearies,” says the mamma. “Hurry and make yourselves presentable for the tea-table.”

And while they are doing so, what do you think the boys are

up to in Jack's room, that presently Gracie and Mamie hear queer little giggles and sounds of laughter, which excite their curiosity to such an extent that they creep softly upstairs to see what is going on. They find the boys busy at getting up impromptu descriptions of a colored lithograph which has been bashfully presented Chloe by Jem, and which she proudly exhibited to Jack as a token of Jem's kind feelings for her. Grace and Mamie are invited to add their talent on the occasion, and the result of this combination of genius is so extraordinary that I will show it to you right here, and add that Chloe was so pleased with it as "somefin what ain't hurt de pictur a mite, but done gib a heap o' fun to dem chillens," that she hung it up in the kitchen where she could feast her eyes upon it all day, sometimes turning the *picture* out, and sometimes keeping the *rhymes* out for plain view, each having a turn at showing off.

THE RHYME.

FRANK. This is a picture of three homely folks,
Who are standing outside their door.

JACK. And they're wishing the snow
Would come faster, you know,
To cover the landscape o'er.

ROBIN. I'm glad my sisters are prettier, by far—
And their dear brother Robin, better looking than they are.
(There's a fault in this rhythm ; it's somewhat lame,
But then my *intentions* are good—all the same.)

GUILO. I no can write this at all myself,
So Frank he do it for me.
The peoples that are in this picture look
Like some peoples over the sea—
And it makes me sad for my Italee.

FRANK. Oh, feathery flakes, that flutter and fall
From far above, where the clouds so gray
Are stretching themselves towards endless space,
What messages bring ye down to-day?
Do ye tell of the winter sprites which dwell
In an unknown region far o'erhead?
Methinks I hear ye answering—"Yes.
Get out your skates, and your battered sled,
Your swift toboggans, and have your fun
'Till the snow to the spring-time *slush* shall run."

Oh, *horrid!*

JACK. You little silly girl, with paws
Upreaching to the sky,
Pray do you think a snow-flake cares
Within those paws to die?
And what a namby-pamby boy!
I see beside you there—
(Rob says if I don't stop just here
There'll be no space to sparé.)

ROBBIE. I guess these folks are glad to see
The snow come down at last,
So they a big sleigh ride will get
Before the winter's past.

GUILO. I no can think what more to say—and so
I let my other turn at writing go.

MAMIE. The boys *I* know—that are *alive*,
Are lots better to see
Than this girl-boy in the picture here
Can ever, ever be.

GRACIE. I think this picture is very nice,
And I think it's a dreadful pity
That we foolish children should write such trash,
And think they're being witty.

RHODA. If this were a prettier picture
I could write a better rhyme,
But it isn't worth while on such a tribe
To waste my valuable time.
But our Chloe's a perfect treasure,
And when this rhyming's done
Tho' it does make sport of *her* picture,
She'll appreciate the fun.

At supper, as Robin finishes his last biscuit, he remarks
“Well, this has been a no end quiet day for Christmas, but I
s'pose you'll let us sit up a little later to-night, mamma, to pay
for it?”

Mamma smiles.

“I guess so, Robin Hood, as you've all been so good. Maybe
you can have as long an evening as the grown people to-night.”

Robbie jumps up, overcome with gratitude, and as the other

children are about to fall in with his energetic "Hurrah! for the boss mamma!" the sound of sweet melody steals in from outside and every one's attention is attracted on the instant.

Sweetly and clearly the music of young voices swells into a glad chorus of song, and Frank starts for the hall door, presently tiptoeing back to beckon the others after him.

And there before the door, heedless of the fast-falling snow, are the little invited guests, who have amongst themselves planned to give a Christmas carol serenade to the hosts and hostesses of the evening. Sam Jessup, the big boy of the group, plays his toy pipe in good tune with the voices of the singers about him, and the words of a beautiful old Christmas carol are sung out merrily upon the wintry air, as the snowflakes fall softly and quietly from the misty world above, and the warm glow of the lights within the house streams ruddily out upon the scene.

There is a noisy time of surprise and greeting, when finally the song is finished, and the children of the house—who are taken so completely by surprise—are able to express their delight.

In a few moments the porch is deserted, and the parlor within almost overflowing with young and merry life.

"Let's have Jem and his banjo, mamma," suggests Rhoda, and presently he appears to accompany Mrs. Wakely as she plays a few dance tunes on the piano. After dancing and some games, old Chloe appears with the announcement that "De 'feshments



THE SURPRISE PARTY MAKES ITSELF HEARD.

is now done waitin' for de young honeys, ef dey please walk inter de oder room," and a rush is made to the well-filled table in the dining-room.

After the supper there is time for a little more dancing, and some games, and Frank, looking out upon the night, reports that the snow has ceased, and there is a gleam of light across the sky, in the place where the moon ought to be.

At ten o'clock the party will "break up," as Robbie ruefully says (wishing he could slyly put back the hands of the big old-fashioned clock which stands in the hall, and will ring its warning bell promptly on the hour). But between now and then there will be time for lots of fun, and pretty soon the papas will arrive to escort their young lambs back again to the home-folds.

Then there will be the good-night song, and plenty of childish hugs and good-by kisses, ere the Christmas party is fairly over, and become a thing of the past.

Meanwhile, way down at New Preston station something is happening which in another chapter we will talk more fully about.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNEXPECTED CHRISTMAS GIFT.



AS the evening train coming into Preston finally stands still before the little depot, there steps from one of the cars a slender young woman with a bundle under her arm, and the check for her trunk in her hand. She is only a young negro girl, and so, though she is evidently a perfect stranger in the place, and looks about her with a puzzled and anxious pair of black eyes, nobody takes the least interest concerning her. She has asked one or two questions, but the hurried replies have not been of much service to her, after all, and so at last she stands quite alone upon the further end of the platform, and waits for a chance to speak to the busy baggage-man, just now giving his attention to one of the passengers, who appears to be rather impatient about something.

"Wal, sir, you see, sir," he is saying with a shrug of his shoulders, "the fact is that our reg'lar driver is havin' one of his turns of rhoomatiz, an' the fellow as is takin' his place isn't allers

stiddy, an' I s'pose he's been on one o' his sprees to-day, an' like as not that's the reason of his bein' behind time with the stage. It's a confounded shame, I'll own, but it karnt be helped, sir, no ways as I can see. Folks has jist got to grin an' bar' it. You mought have to wait an hour, an' agin he mought be here in a minit or so."

"But couldn't I get a wagon, or something that a horse can draw? I can't wait here for all time, and I'm willing to pay well for a team," says the passenger.

"The man looks doubtful, and gives his shoulders another shrug. "Wal, you see this ain't much of a place, but there's a fellow lives yonder," pointing to a small cottage over in the field, "has got a wagin he might spare, but you'd have to bargain with his wife, for he's away for a day or so, an' you'd have to git the thing back to him to-morrer."

"That's all right," says the passenger, and off he goes in search of the team, leaving the baggage-man free to listen to the woman.

"I'm sure I don't know," he says presently, after she has finished. "You see, you and the man I've been talkin' to air the only two creeturs bound up that way, an' if he gits the team he's gone to see 'bout, mebbe he'll give ye a lift, an' if he won't, you'll have ter wait for the stage, an' laud knows how long that'll be. Got your check there?"



HE GIVES HER A SEAT AND THEY START OFF.

She hands him her check, and he pushes her trunk out from the small number of trunks about him.

"Passengers is scanty to-night," he says, "an' seein' as the stage is late, I dunno but it's lucky."

Then he shouts out some order to his assistant, and the woman is forgotten. She stands near, however, and draws her shawl more closely about her, for the air is chilly, and she is tired and nervous.

"S'pose de stage done come 'long 'fore mornin' anyhow," she thinks, "an' dat'll be better dan no stage at all." She stands beside her little shabby trunk, so as to keep a watchful eye upon it. Pretty soon the sound of a horse's trot is heard, and the baggage-man looking down the road sees a wagon approaching.

As it passes the platform he calls out. "So you got your team, eh? Wal, good luck to ye!" Then a thought strikes him and he shouts again so suddenly that the man in the wagon reins up his shambling old nag, and turns his head around.

"I say! hold on, I forgot! here's a woman wants to go your way. She's got an aunt livin' in Marble Dale, an old colored woman named Chloe. She lives to the Wakelys'! Can't you give her a lift? Seem's a pity to let her wait for old Silas to come 'long!"

The passenger turns about, and drives to the platform, inviting the woman to step in. He gives her a seat beside him, and they

start off together in the gloom of the wintry night. The moon is still struggling with clouds, but there is light enough to see the road distinctly, and the nag shambles on after a peculiar gait of his own.

The two passengers talk together, of course, but what they say doesn't concern us, so we will pass over that and the miles between the depot at New Preston and the village of Marble Dale, and are now just entering the latter.

Presently they pass little groups of young folks chatting merrily, and evidently full of a subject which has greatly interested them.

"A child's party, probably," thinks the man, smiling, "and there has been a jolly Christmas evening somewhere."

Then to the woman: "You say your aunt doesn't expect you, my girl. You will make a nice and most welcome Christmas gift for her, won't you?"

The girl's face beams with glad anticipations.

"Oh yes, sir! I planned it to be so, an' only for your kindness in fotchin' me along, half my fun would have been done spiled, sir."

"You are sure, arn't you, that Chlo's mistress won't object to her having a visitor?" asks the man with a laugh, and more for the sake of a little harmless teasing than because he really fears for the girl.

But she replies merrily: "Ho, dat's de bestest part of de fun. Aunt Chlo' she done write me a year back as how her mistiss say I could come an' lib wid her any time, 'cause dere's allers somefin for a good, smairt girl to do, an' so I knows I won't be in no one's way, you see."

"Very well, here we are; and now you go round to the back door, and knock, and when you see me again, don't forget to tell me how things turned out for you."

"But mebbe I won't see you agin, sir," says the girl anxiously, "so I want for to tank you now for your kindness."

The man laughs. "Oh, you'll see me sooner than you think, perhaps. Now hurry in, and good luck to you and your aunt."

And when the girl has turned the corner of the house, the man leaves the wagon, softly steps upon the porch, looks through the window of the sitting-room, sees a sweet-faced lady in an easy-chair before the fire, with two laddies and two lassies kneeling at each side of her, and only the ruddy glow of the fire lighting the scene.

Then he turns the handle of the door gently, enters the hall, and pausing at the sitting-room door only long enough to learn that the children within are about saying good-night to their mother after a merry evening of fun, he goes in quietly and sits down beside them before the fire.

There is a start of astonishment, a long look of amazement from five pairs of eyes, and then, oh, then!—

“Papa! it is, it is papa!” “Oh, my dear husband!” This from children and mother, and there is a grand time of kisses and embraces before the returned traveler can explain that an unexpected turn in business matters gave him a chance to make of himself an additional Christmas gift for his family. And while he explains his appearance, old Chloe and her niece Sallie are having an equally good time of hugs and embraces out in the kitchen; and presently the noise brings downstairs the Wakelys, from father to son, and while Chloe gets a hot supper for the new-comers, there is no end of a good time going on in the sitting-room.

Robbie and his sisters are wild with joy. Frank stands between his mother and father with a loving arm around each; Mr. and Mrs. Wakely, Rhoda and Jack sit close by,—and thus we will leave them all, and bid them good-night and good-by, only lingering long enough to learn that with the beginning of the new year the Moores will return to their city home, and that Rhoda and Jack are cordially invited to go with them as welcome little guests for the rest of the winter. Mamma Wakely thanks Mamma Moore for the invitation to her children, and the matter will be considered as favorably as possible. I know my little readers will be anxious to know whether Rhoda and Jack really will go to the

city, or whether something will turn up to prevent, for we know that the best plans are often frustrated. But they are looking on the bright side, as I write this, and so will we, and some day I may be able to tell you about the New York visit; that is, if Mamma Wakely should give consent, and spare her little comforts for so long a visit away from the Wakely Home.

THE END.



